

### 30 years after Les Immatériaux: art, science and theory

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**30 YEARS**

**LES**

**IMMATÉRIAUX**

**μ**

**HUI**

**BROECKMANN**

**ART**

**SCIENCE**

**THEORY**



## **30 Years after *Les Immatériaux***

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# **30 Years after *Les Immatériaux*: Art, Science, and Theory**

edited by

**Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann**



**meson press**



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# Introduction

Yuk Hui and Andreas Broeckmann

## The Postmodern in *Les Immatériaux*

In 1985, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, together with the design theorist Thierry Chaput, curated the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. He had accepted an invitation by the *Minister for Culture* and the *Center for Industrial Creation (CCI)*. Six years after Lyotard's report on *The Postmodern Condition* (1979),<sup>1</sup> the exhibition demonstrated the hypothesis which he had described in the report. The objects and artworks shown expressed his observations of what was happening in domains such as art, science and philosophy, under the new condition of communication technologies. Lyotard's report is considered to be a response to another report by Simon Nora and Alain Minc, in the 1970s, which proposed the "computerisation of society"<sup>2</sup>. Nora and Minc's project lead to the development of the French *Minitel* system. According to Lyotard, the new "post-modern" condition demanded a new sensibility, as he stated in the principle proposition for the exhibition: "The insecurity, the loss of identity, the crisis is not expressed only in economy and the social, but also in the domains of the sensibility, of the knowledge and the power of man (futility, life, death), the modes of life (in relation to work, to habits, to food, ... etc.)."<sup>3</sup> A constant return to the postmodern condition became a general method of Lyotard's philosophical thinking to go beyond the modern imagination, and guided the construction of the exhibition which was, in his own words, a "manifestation", a "non-exhibition".

1 Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1979).

2 Charlie Gere, *Art, Time and Technology* (Oxford: Berg, 2006), p. 139.

3 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1985), p. 26.

The title of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* demonstrates a form of resistance against the modern conception of materiality. The original title for the project that the CCI had initiated already in 1981, before Lyotard got involved in 1983, was *Création et matériaux nouveaux*. This title was changed several times: *Matériau et création*, *Matériaux nouveaux et création*, *La Matière dans tous ses états*, before it was finally announced to the public as *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>4</sup> The etymological root *mât* refers to making by hand, to measure, to construct. The moderns since Descartes conceive a dualism and hence an opposition between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*; the thinking mind becomes the foundation of knowledge and also the judge of what is real. As Lyotard wrote: "In the tradition of modernity, the relation of the human with materials is fixed by the Cartesian programme: to become master and possessor of nature. A free will imposes its ends to the given sense data to divert them away from their natural sense. It will determine their end with the help of language which allows it to articulate what is possible (a project) and to impose it upon what is real (matter)."<sup>5</sup>

Hence Lyotard considered that a title such as *matériaux nouveaux* would only perpetuate the modern conception, while using the prefix *im-* could introduce a moment of self-reflection: "The exhibition [*manifestation*] entitled *Les Immatériaux* has the purpose of presenting [*faire sentir*] how much this relation is altered by the fact of new materials. In this extended sense, the new materials are not only new materials, they interrogate an idea of the human who works, who projects, who remembers: of an author."<sup>6</sup> The immaterial is fundamentally material. The point was not to appreciate the new materiality brought by the telecommunication technologies, but rather to question the relation between man and his desire to become the master of matter. The aim of calling it "immaterial", like the designation of the "postmodern", was to liberate man from the modern paradigm, and to release material from the prison of the industrial revolution.

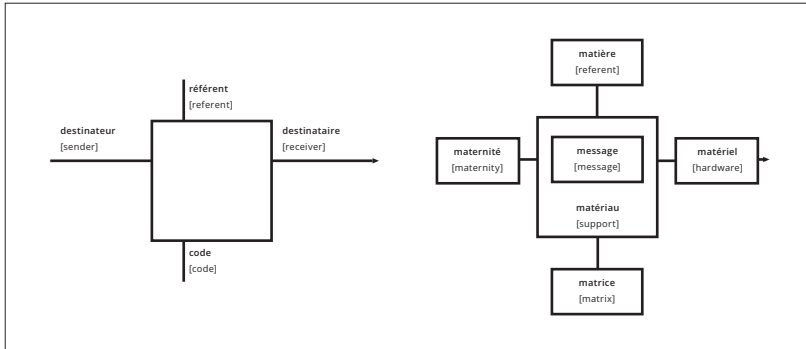
At the time, Lyotard had just finished writing *Le Différend*, a book dedicated to the philosophy of Kant and Wittgenstein, in which Lyotard wanted to re-read the history of philosophy according to what was called the *linguistic turn*.<sup>7</sup> The *differend* refers to an unresolved conflict due to the lack of rules or metanarratives which are common to two different systems of discourse. We should also recognise that language was always at the centre of his thoughts, as was already evident since his PhD thesis, which was later published as

4 Antony Hudek, "From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*", in this volume, p. 72.

5 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1985), p. 16.

6 Ibid.

7 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Minuit, 1983).



[Figure 1] Communication diagram (Source: *Petit Journal*, 28 March–15 July 1985, Paris, p. 2. Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

*Discours, Figure* (1971).<sup>8</sup> The question of language was hence fundamental to Lyotard's conceptualisation of this exhibition, especially since telecommunication technology had created a new materiality of language between senders and receivers; or more fundamentally, it served as the basis of the postmodern turn. The conception of language as a tool also characterises modernity, because "modernity presupposes that everything speaks, this means that so long as we can connect to it, capture it, translate it and interpret it, there is no fundamental difference between data and a phrase; there is no fundamental difference between a phenomenon of displacement in an electromagnetic spectrum and a logical proposition".<sup>9</sup> But it is also such an equivalence that allows Lyotard to develop an ontology of the material or immaterial according to a model of telecommunication: *matériau*/medium, *matériel*/receiver (*destinataire*), *maternité*/emitter (*destinateur*), *matière*/referent, and *matrice*/code [Figure 1]. The new materiality was mapped onto the model of telecommunication. The objects and artworks in the exhibition, as well as the 60 sites at which they were presented, were also classified and ordered according to these five categories.

## Art and Science in Question

Lyotard compared the displacement of the electromagnetic spectrum and logical propositions, and continued: "given this fact, in this face-to-face relation to a universe that is his to dominate – a heroic relation, I would say – in order to make himself the master of it, man must become something else entirely: the human subject becomes no longer a subject but, I would say, one case among others, albeit a case which retains this privilege, until proven otherwise

8 Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, Figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971), translated into English by Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

9 From Lyotard's report, "Après six mois de travail"; see this volume, p. 33.

(which is extremely improbable)".<sup>10</sup> It was clear to the curatorial team that technology was not the cause of a rupture, but rather the sign of the decline of the figure of the modern, and that at the same time technology made this modern project reflect upon itself, and destabilise itself.<sup>11</sup> In Lyotard's words, technology places humanity once again in a condition of childhood, of immaturity. This reference to immaturity is in direct contrast to what Kant defined as the project of the Enlightenment, namely to overcome the condition of *Unmündigkeit*.

*Unmündigkeit*, however, is not opposed to maturity; rather it is opposed to authority, or more precisely, to the authority that legislates as the sole voice. Scientific knowledge has been such an authority, which not only demythologises the universe, but also has a demoralising impact upon what Lyotard calls the problem of legitimation.<sup>12</sup> The postmodern also questions a certain hegemony of authority and hence radically opens up the way that knowledge is acquired and narrated. The arrival of the postmodern demands a sensitivity to the material conditions, at the same time as it gives us a new sensibility of living. In the 1980s and '90s, we saw the celebration of the postmodern, as a liberation from the shackles of rules, codes, oppositions, and especially of the modern; a celebration which was evident in almost all domains listed in the exhibition: alimentation, perfume, architecture, urbanism, art, astrophysics and physics, biology and genetics, writing, habitat, mathematics, money, music, theatre, dance etc. The setting of the exhibition is probably the best illustration of this. It presents us with a labyrinth in which every object is at once familiar and strange. Envisaging the construction of the exhibition space, Lyotard proposed to go back to an idea of Denis Diderot who, when reviewing the paintings of Claude Joseph Vernet in the 1767 Salon, presented them not as pictures to be viewed following the traditional logic of the division of gallery space, but rather described them as real sites, in the form of disorientations of space.

The exhibition arose from an effort to move the concept of the postmodern outside of books and to find its support in other objects, such as scientific, industrial and art objects. This approach reflected a global vision, without referring specifically to social and economic aspects.<sup>13</sup> The exhibited objects tended to bring in new forms of thinking that would call the modern into ques-

10 Ibid.

11 "Deuxième état des immatériaux", Archive of Centre Pompidou, March 1984.

12 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 6–9.

13 According to the testimony of member of the curatorial team Chantel Noël, from "La Règle du Jeu: Matérialiser *Les Immatériaux* – Entretien avec l'équipe du C.C.I.", in *Modernes, et après? "Les Immatériaux"*, ed. Élie Théofilakis (Paris: Édition Autrement, 1985). This distance from social and economic aspects was however disputed between the team members in the interview.

tion. In quantum mechanics, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle claims that we cannot know the location and speed of a particle simultaneously. Speed and location are two important concepts in classical mechanics, since it is the displacement of location and duration that gives us velocity and acceleration. The presence of particles can now only be imagined in terms of probabilities. This involves both a mathematical reduction as well as a dematerialisation of objects in our universe, including stars, galaxies, bodies and mind. For example, the first seconds of the birth of the universe are represented by means of a quantifiable model with which we can explain the genesis of the cosmos, as if there were human subjects who witnessed the process.

We might say that the cosmic mystery has changed through the discovery of the "immaterial". The universe is no longer either a stable mechanical model or a perfect self-organising organism. We can not only observe the movement of the stellar bodies, but also witness their birth and death. What does such a change in scientific discovery mean? In the minutes of a meeting of the curatorial team from 20th March 1984 dedicated to this topic<sup>14</sup> there is a testimony from the astrophysicist Michel Cassé, one of the participants of the exhibition: "Why is the universe so equivocal? Why is the rate of expansion as it is? If it was different, we wouldn't be here interrogating ourselves: a universe more dense would shut itself down before all appearance of life. The miraculous coincidences, are they not inevitable in every universe that shelter a conscious observer?"

The art objects in the exhibition pose similar questions and affirm the uncertainty brought about by new techniques. These objects remain, in a certain sense, instrumental in demonstrating Lyotard's vision of the post-modern. More than anything, *Les Immatériaux* performed the disappearance of the body, both in the presentation of the objects and in the audience's experience. The new body and mind materialise in the form of codes. At the entrance there was an Egyptian bas-relief sculpture, followed by a long and dark corridor. Visitors had to wear headphones and listen to the soundtrack, playing different programmes of spoken texts in 26 different zones throughout the exhibition space. After passing through the corridor, one entered the *Théâtre du non-corps* dedicated to Samuel Beckett, which showed five dioramas installed by Beckett's set designer, Jean-Claude Fall. There was no actor, or rather there were actors without bodies: the first direct reflection upon the modern gaze. From here began five different, intersecting paths, with more than 60 sites. For example, corresponding to the category *Matériau*, the site entitled *Deuxième peau* showed different types of grafts made of pork skins, cultivated skins, and artificial skins. Another site, entitled *L'ange*, displayed a large photograph of Annegret Soltau's *Schwanger* (1978), which shows the artist's body in different stages of a pregnancy.



In the category *Matrice*, the site called *Jeu d'échecs* showed the heuristics of a chess game with computers; codes were everywhere, even machines that calculated the statistics of visitors. Through the lens of technical objects, visitors would confront the limit of their own bodies, and the complexity of the universe. In the category *Materiel*, for instance, there was a documentary film about the birth and death of stars projected on a big screen.

For Lyotard, the most fundamental aspect of the transformations mapped in *Les Immatériaux* is language. In a documentary about the exhibition titled *Octave au pays des immatériaux*, Lyotard concluded the film by saying that "language is the most immaterial system that material has succeeded in forming" [*le langage est le système le plus immatériel que la matière ait réussi à former*]. In fact, we can probably understand that the coding of materials brings them closer and closer to the form of messages. Hence after passing along the five categories of objects and artworks, the exhibition displays another set of works in a space entitled *Labyrinthe du langage*, dedicated to Jorge Luis Borges. Not only the materiality of writing has changed, but also its form of presentation, the way it is written.

The art historian Charlie Gere has observed that the artistic programme of the exhibition "was not just a reflection of Lyotard's own taste, but an expression of his strongly held belief that only such work could properly express or invoke the sublime."<sup>15</sup> What would be the sublime that this exhibition sought after? On this point, Lyotard returned to the aesthetic judgement of Kant, especially the feeling of the sublime. Kant defines the sublime as "the mere capacity of thinking which evidences a faculty of mind transcending every standard of the senses."<sup>16</sup> Like aesthetic judgement, the sense feeling is not subsumed by any concept; but unlike aesthetic judgement, it involves the imagination and reason instead of the understanding and the imagination. We can speculate that the exhibition put the sublime itself into question, for the sublime is no longer only a question of aesthetics but also a question of politics, one that is deeply grounded in culture and history. Clement Greenberg saw modernism as a response to what he called "the romantic crisis" around the mid-19th century.<sup>17</sup> Since then modernism has not ceased to be self-critical. In contrast, the postmodern – especially Lyotard's reading of Kant's reflective judgement – resonates with the work of the early Romantics such as Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. We may say that, for Lyotard, what the postmodern responds to is precisely the belief or the illusion of the stable and self-critical figure of the human. Lyotard makes a strong distinction between situation

15 Gere, *Art, Time and Technology*, p. 147.

16 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith and Nicolas Walker (Oxford University Press, 2007), §25, p. 81.

17 Clement Greenberg, "Modern and Postmodern", *Arts*, 54, No.6 (February 1980), [www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html](http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/postmodernism.html).

and presentation (*Darstellung*).<sup>18</sup> Art as presentation or as re-presentation is restricted, for Lyotard, to the understanding of Kant's first *Critique*. The sublime must manifest itself as contradiction, or conflict between the imagination and reason. On one hand, the imagination confronts its limit to represent that which it cannot present; on the other hand, reason has to violate the interdict that it itself poses of not going beyond the concepts of sensible intuition.<sup>19</sup> The sublime is not about conformity (to concepts), but rather contradiction arises at the moment of here and now as an event (*Ereignis*) in the sense of Heidegger, or more precisely in the question: *arrive-t-il?*<sup>20</sup> In relation to this supposition, the following is crucial for our inquiry: Lyotard's discourse on the sublime did not concern so much whether technology-based art can give us the sublime or not. Instead, we should re-situate the whole discourse of the postmodern and Lyotard's ambivalent feeling about technology and its relation to postmodernity. Lyotard posed the question of the relationship between art and technology at the end of a lecture entitled "*Something like: communication... without communication*":

The question raised by the new technologies in connection to their relation to art is that of the here-and-now. What does "here" mean on the phone, on television, at the receiver of an electronic telescope? And the "now"? Does not the "tele-" element necessarily obscure the presence, the "here-and-now" of the forms and their "carnal" reception? What is a place, a moment, not anchored in the immediate "suffering" of what *happens* [*arrive*]. Is a computer in any way here and now? Can anything *happen* [*arriver*] with it? Can anything happen to it?<sup>21</sup>

## Matter and Sentiment

Here we can see doubts and questions in the face of rapid technological development and industrialisation. In the article "*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*", published in the collection *L'Inhuman* (1988), Lyotard wrote: "The question of a hegemonic teleculture on a world scale is already posed."<sup>22</sup> This doubt of Lyotard concerning the relation between the postmodern and technologies also results in its critique. From the 1990s up to today, we can locate different efforts that try to situate the postmodern in a large historical perspective in order to find a way out of the melancholia accompanied by the liberation.

18 Élise Marrou, "De Lyotard à Wittgenstein: un différend? Anthropocentrisme et acosmisme", in *Lyotard à Nanterre* (Klincksieck, 2010).

19 Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 55.

20 Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde", in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 93.

21 Jean-François Lyotard, "Something like: communication... without communication", in *The Inhuman*, p. 118 (translation modified).

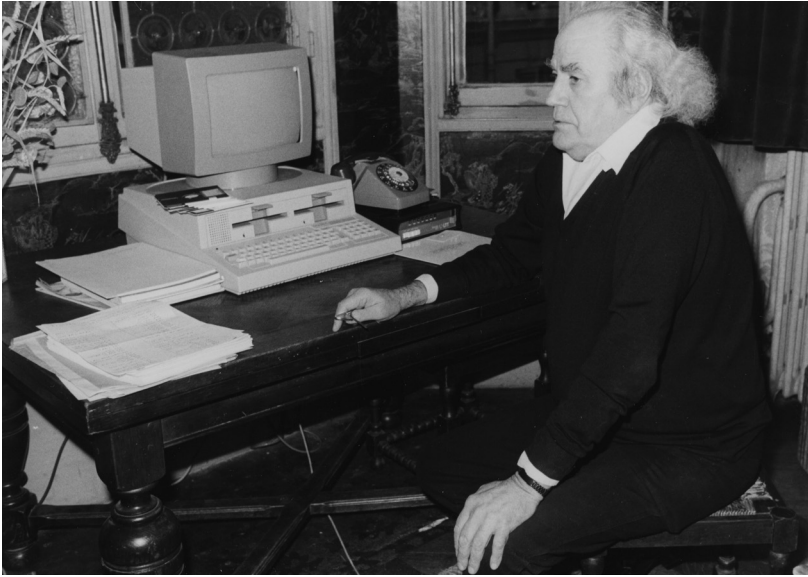
22 Jean-François Lyotard, "*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*", in *The Inhuman*, p. 50.

According to the analysis of art historian Nicolas Bourriaud, the postmodern is the epoch of melancholia. Taking up the theory of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk, Bourriaud proposed that this melancholia comes from disillusionment with the superabundance of energy and resources and the power of conquest, especially the energy crisis in 1973 and the end of the 30 glorious years (1945–75) in France. Bourriaud proposed what he calls “the Altermodern” as the successor to the Postmodern, an epoch in which everyone is uprooted from their proper culture and becomes a nomad, a *homo viator*.<sup>23</sup> It seems to us that this figure still falls squarely within the discourse of the postmodern, however. In fact reflection on the melancholia of the postmodern was addressed by Lyotard during the preparation of this exhibition, in a document entitled *Deuxième état des immatériaux*, dated March 1984. According to this document, the exhibition wanted to reflect in its *mise en scène* the melancholia brought by the failure of Europe’s and America’s extension of the Enlightenment project. This distance from an enlightened, bright and transparent society created a sorrow (*chagrin*) among their people.<sup>24</sup>

With the project of the present publication, 30 years after *Les Immatériaux* and 35 years after the appearance of the *La Condition postmoderne*, we wanted to investigate what has been happening in the wake of their epochal hypotheses and observations; or more precisely, what has been happening to the question of the postmodern. No doubt, many things have happened. The social, economic and political conditions have changed, and so have the technological conditions. Digital technology perpetuates the modern desire for control and mastery through networks, databases, algorithms and simulations. Digital technology, which was once the figure instead of the ground, slowly becomes the ground of governance, communication, and scientific research methods. It seems to have not only challenged the epistemes of science and art, but also their epistemologies. At the time of *Les Immatériaux*, the World Wide Web had not yet appeared, *Minitels* were the main computational devices in the exhibition, and some projects actually faltered because the curatorial team had difficulties in finding a sufficiently powerful server. One of the most significant projects in the *Labyrinthe du langage* was *Épreuves d’écriture*, a collaborative online writing project which resulted in the second catalogue of the exhibition. It invited 26 writers, including philosophers and social scientists such as Jacques Derrida, Bruno Latour, François Chatelet, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Isabelle Stengers and Dan Sperber, to contribute commentaries on 50 keywords [Figure 2]. Over the course of two months, the participants wrote small entries for each keyword, and at the same time criticised, or commented upon, the entries and comments of others. During the exhibition, the visitors could use five *Minitel* terminals

23 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern* (London: Tate Publishing, 2009).

24 “Deuxième état des immatériaux”, p. 4.



[Figure 2] François Chatelet with the Olivetti computer used for the *Épreuves d'écriture* writing experiment (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

connected to a central server to access the entries either by keywords or by the names of the authors. This was probably one of the earliest collective and networked writing experiences, presented to the public when the computer was not yet popular.

In art, we have since witnessed the rise and fall of new media art. On the one hand we observe more and more intensive interdisciplinary collaboration with science and technologies; on the other hand, art, design and technology are converging under the force of the culture industry. In science, simulation has overturned the established epistemology, since scientific experiments – the fundamental research method proposed by Francis Bacon – now demand collaboration with computer simulations. In 2013 the Nobel prize for chemistry went to Martin Karplus, Michael Levitt and Arieh Warshel, who since the 1970s have devoted themselves to the development of molecular dynamics simulations. In the humanities, we have observed the rise of a new, heavily funded discipline – digital humanities – coinciding, after the concept of the *inhuman* proposed by Lyotard in 1986, with discourses on the post-human, cyborgs, non-human, object-oriented philosophy, and so on. In light of the transformation brought by telecommunications technologies, we want to revisit Lyotard's hypothesis of the destabilisation of the concept of the modern. Where is this concept of the human going after the *post-*, the beyond? Should we not demand a new way of orientation after mastery and

disorientation, perhaps an orientation that imposes neither a will to mastery nor the misery of turbulence?

### Reorientation: 30 Years after *Les Immatériaux*

If we can summarise the Modern as the will to mastery, and the Postmodern as a celebration of disorientation, we propose that we should proceed to a re-orientation which avoids both mastery and disorientation. Orientation is necessarily anamnesis – that is to say, a recollection of what is past – in the minds, in cultural objects, and in a new cartography. The initiative of conducting a research project 30 years after *Les Immatériaux* is not only to pay homage to it, and to understand its significance in historical perspective (in terms of art and theory), but also to reflect upon the transformation of “postmodern culture”.

*Politics.* As for “disorientation”, the first sense of the word destroys order, rules and roots; a second sense concerns the Orient and the Occident, a geopolitical and cultural development under globalisation, supported by technologies. Countries outside Europe, such as China, which are believed to have never experienced modernity, suddenly had to adapt to the postmodern discourse. How could we reassess this, 30 years later? If we need to rediscover the sentiment, then the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan since late 2001, the credit crunch in 2008, and the *Arab Spring* in 2011, have brought melancholia to an end. Instead we can probably identify a new sentiment in what Franco Berardi has conceptualised as a “state of panic”. This panic comes not only from social and economic conditions, but also from the networks of transmission: images and sounds of suicide attacks directly reach our eyes through fibre cables; the figures of stock exchange rates are instantly updated on the screens of our smartphones, tablets, and computers; moreover, we are faced with the national surveillance schemes on telecommunication channels, and the proliferation of cyber-attacks. Re-orientation demands a new vision of the conflicts between values and cultures, as well as a new geopolitical order, which in turn calls for a new form of legitimacy.

*Aesthetics.* We observe that social, economic and political conditions have reversed the promise of the postmodern. Think, for example, of Henry Lefebvre’s postmodernist critique of Le Corbusier’s functionalism and the desire to control in architectural and urban forms: “The street contains functions that were overlooked by Le Corbusier: the informative function, the symbolic function, the ludic function. The street is a place to play and learn. The street is disorder.”<sup>25</sup> Today the disorder of the street becomes

25 Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 18.

what Richard Florida pinpoints as the “creative city”.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the postmodern critique becomes a tool of neoliberal discourse. According to Fredric Jameson, the postmodern follows the logic of late capitalism, in a continuation of the culture industry critiqued by Adorno and Horkheimer.<sup>27</sup> The disorientation once celebrated as liberation can now be conceived as a source of sorrow. The long-lasting *post-* comes and must come to its end.

*Knowledge:* The telecommunications technologies embody a model of communication which is more interactive than ever. Within this new configuration, the legitimacy of knowledge is firstly challenged by top-down authoritarian legislation. The development of the digital has pervaded every aspect of our daily life, yesterday’s *Minitels* have been replaced by personal computers, pads and smartphones. Theorisation, as the editor of the *Wired Magazine* Chris Anderson provocatively claimed, is coming to an end, since big data will make it “obsolete”. What is rendered obsolete, however, is not only any kind of narrative – whether “grand narratives” or “micro-narratives” – but also any attempt at setting up hypotheses, constructing models and conducting proofs, as they had been practised by science since the time of Francis Bacon.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years we have seen new titles such as Hypermodern, Supermodern and Altermodern, which try to address the new condition after the post-modern. In contrast, we believe that, in order to articulate this new phase, a more historical and geopolitical dimension of the modern must be tackled, and that a new imagination is required. In autumn 2013 the Centre Pompidou hosted – on its 5th floor, where *Les Immatériaux* had also been held – an exhibition entitled *Plural Modernities 1905–1970*. This historical recognition of *Plural Modernities*, though it affirmed cultural heterogeneity, seemed indifferent to the concept of the modern itself, and to what happened after the post-modern; to the sensibility produced by the material conditions, which not only affect the way we look at the present, but also the past – i.e., world history. The past loses its power when it can no longer contribute to the here and now; hence we feel the need to carry out an anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*.

26 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

27 See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), and Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectics of the Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979).

28 Chris Anderson, “The End of Theory: The Data Deluge Makes the Scientific Method Obsolete”; online: [archive.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb\\_theory](http://archive.wired.com/science/discoveries/magazine/16-07/pb_theory).

## Structure of the Book

This book is divided into three parts. The first part, “Document”, offers the first publication of the transcript of a report which Lyotard addressed – probably to his colleagues – in the spring of 1984. The text does not have an original title, which is why it is referred to according to its first words, “After six months of work” (*Après six mois de travail*). In this text, Lyotard speaks about conceptual, theoretical and practical considerations regarding the preparations for the exhibition. It not only offers interesting insights into the evolution of the guiding conceptual principles of *Les Immatériaux*, which were subsequently translated into curatorial and scenographic decisions, but also highlights the need to historicise the exhibition and its preparatory phase, which had already begun in 1981 with extensive research by Chaput and his team. This preparatory phase included a first conceptual sketch provided by Lyotard in August 1983, which was then pinpointed by the report first translated into English here – a report whose opening words already point us to the transitory, evolutionary work that would eventually lead to the exhibition.

The second part of the book focuses on the artistic programme of *Les Immatériaux* and contains texts by art historians and artists who discuss various aspects of the historical significance of *Les Immatériaux*. In the 2000s, three art historians conducted extensive research into the background and context of the exhibition: Francesca Gallo, Antony Hudek, and Antonia Wunderlich. We have included a text by Hudek here, which offers a detailed analysis of the main parameters of the exhibition, and homes in on the relationship of its artistic and philosophical programmes. Hudek also contextualises *Les Immatériaux* in relation to contemporaneous developments in conceptual and postmodern art.

Francesca Gallo has contributed a new text in which she highlights the selection of some contemporary artists for the exhibition, especially some female artists in whose work the notion of “the *immaterial*” features in a particularly pertinent manner. Gallo also suggests that more recent internet-based artworks continue the line of questioning communication and materiality first proposed in the exhibition.<sup>29</sup>

29 We had originally also planned to include a chapter from German art historian Antonia Wunderlich’s book about *Les Immatériaux* entitled *Der Philosoph im Museum* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2008), in which she describes the “Phénoménologie de la visite” in great detail, offering a most comprehensive account of what could actually be seen and experienced in the exhibition. Wunderlich puts together a site-by-site description of the exhibition, drawing on the catalogues as well as reviews, interviews and other statements by members of the audience, journalists and team members. Regrettably, the translation and reprint of this 150-page text, which is currently only available in German, were impossible to realise for the present volume; it will, however, no doubt be an important source for any future research on *Les Immatériaux*.

The French art historian Thierry Dufrène contributes the hypothesis that, by analogy with the conception of the *"immaterial"*, the exhibition also implicitly proposed a concept of the *"immodern"*, which would not be the negation but rather a specific inflection of the modern. Dufrène situates the immodern as the ontology of interaction, juxtaposing the modern (subject) and postmodern (crisis).

The artist Jean-Louis Boissier has contributed two texts. One is an interview conducted by Andreas Broeckmann in which Boissier speaks about the historical context in which *Les Immatériaux* was realised. Importantly, he provides insights into the curatorial and production process which do not belittle Lyotard's role and impact on the project, yet which underscore the importance of the contributions of Thierry Chaput, Philippe Délis, the team of the CCI, as well as the dozens of other cooperation partners and participants.

The impression that it is historically untenable to speak of *Les Immatériaux* as "Lyotard's exhibition" was confirmed by Lyotard himself when, in the 1984 report included in this volume, he repeatedly spoke about the team and the consensual way of working. Even in the opening sentence of the report, Lyotard refers to "the question of installation as we have collectively thought it through". With regard to the catalogue and what would become the "Album", documenting the preparations of *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard acknowledged that this volume would also "include the team's working texts spanning almost two years", thus going back long before he himself joined the project. Lyotard recounts that when he suggested some changes to the spatial layout of the exhibition, "this proposition was rejected unanimously by the team almost without discussion, without any argument – fundamentally rejected, as if the team understood that we could not get to the root of this problem of postmodern space through a rapid, controlled spatial layout of a plan for the exhibition."<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere in the report, speaking about the adaptation of the concept of the postmodern to the exhibition space, Lyotard pointed to the consensus within the planning team: "If now I take this barely sketched-out model and transport it to the case of the exhibition, asking myself, therefore, what a postmodern exhibition corresponding to the metropolis or to the nebula of conurbation could be, then I am indeed obliged – *and this is what we have all concluded* – we are obliged to refuse the traditional *dispositif* of the gallery and the salon – that is to say, the *dispositif* which opposes, for example, rooms and the corresponding corridors, habitats and lines of circulation."<sup>31</sup> In this passage, Lyotard expands the authorial subject of the exhibition by

30 Lyotard 1984, in this volume, p. 29, 63, and 55, respectively.

31 In this volume, p. 58 (emphasis added).



pointing to the organising team, indicating that the exhibition as a whole was such a collective effort.<sup>32</sup>

Boissier's second contribution is a case study on the interactive installation *Le Bus*, which he and his students at the University Paris 8 produced for *Les Immatériaux*. The text is not only a detailed account of the project and of the conditions under which it came about, but it also exemplifies how the items and artworks on display in the exhibition each had a history before and after *Les Immatériaux*. The text indicates how a detailed historical account of the exhibition project as a whole will have to place a focus on many, if not each of the individual objects and their producers, and the research that went into them, in order to provide a full picture of what *Les Immatériaux* meant in the broader context of art, science and theory, and the correspondences between them.

The third part of the book contains six reflections on the philosophical questions posed by Lyotard and present in the exhibition, especially with regard to the concept of anamnesis. Two former students of Lyotard's, Bernard Stiegler and Anne-Elisabeth Setjen, provide both an anamnesis of Lyotard's exhibition and of their personal exchanges with him. In her contribution, Setjen explores the relation between *Les Immatériaux* and Lyotard's reading of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. *Les Immatériaux* demonstrates Kant's concept of reflective judgement, not only in the exhibition itself, but also for its students, visitors, etc. It is in light of the *différend* that the reflective judgement becomes autonomous in search of the *sensus communis*, or what she refers as the *transcendants*. The postmodern, Setjen shows, can be read as the reincarnation of Kant's sublime, as well as an act of resistance against the "too human" modern.

In contrast, Bernard Stiegler criticises Lyotard for having ignored the shadow of the sublime. According to Stiegler, Lyotard didn't see the relation between *techné* and the sublime (the product of the imagination and reason) in a profound way, and hence ignored a political economy of the immaterial which has become more and more determined by industry. Stiegler goes back to his early work *Technics and Time 3*, in which he developed the concept of the fourth synthesis of the understanding, as a critique of Kant's three syntheses: namely, apprehension in intuition, reproduction in the imagination, and recognition in a concept. The fourth synthesis is the exteriorised memory or the tertiary retention, which conditions the other three. If one follows Kant in saying that the faculties of the understanding, judgement and reason are built upon one another, then there is also a relation between the sublime

32 In a future, more extensive research effort, the contributions of the participating individuals and groups, and the chronology of their interactions, will have to be etched into relief.

and techné. Stiegler shows that Lyotard's interpretation of Kant lacks the pharmacological critique which becomes urgent in our time.

Yui Hui's and Charlie Gere's texts offer two different readings of anamnesis in relation to the exhibition. Situating the question of the Other in Lyotard's writings before and after the exhibition – *The Differend* (1983) and *The Inhuman* (1988) – Hui's text poses the question: Is the postmodern merely a European project? The exhibition, for Lyotard, was an occasion to reflect on a new metaphysics, one that distances itself from the modern. During the preparation of the exhibition, Lyotard saw the possibility of locating such a metaphysics in Spinoza or in the Japanese Zen Buddhist Dôgen. Lyotard posed the intriguing question of whether the new technologies might give rise to the possibility of achieving a form of anamnesis which he called "passage". Lyotard elaborated on his concept with reference to Freud's concept of *Durcharbeiten*, as well as to Dôgen's concept of "the clear mirror". Hui's text addresses Lyotard's question by reflecting on the differences between the conceptions of *techné* and anamnesis in the philosophical West and East, and suggests pushing Lyotard's question in the direction of a programme of re-orientation in the global context.

Gere's text proposes to understand the exhibition, and especially the use of the headphones and their soundtrack, as an anamnesis of the Holocaust. Reflecting on Lyotard's writing on the hyphen in the expression "Judeo-Christian", and on Giorgio Agamben's critique of Derrida's project of deconstruction as a "thwarted messianism" of "infinite deferment", Gere proposes that writing has sublated the difference between Judaism and Christianity, and hence necessitates the repression and forgetting of the former by the latter. Gere points out the references to Auschwitz in *Les Immatériaux* and suggests that the use of the soundtrack and headphones can be interpreted as an anamnesis of the lost voice of God in philosophy as "*gramma*".

In their texts, Robin Mackay, and Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, explore the political dimension of *Les Immatériaux* as resistance. Mackay provides a rich contextualisation of the exhibition within the politics of the Centre Georges Pompidou, as well the role of the Centre Pompidou in the development of the culture industry in France. He also offers an accelerationist reading of Lyotard's exhibition as a critique of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's 2013 *Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics*, which suggests that the acceleration of capital and technologies will speed up capitalism, as well as lead to its self-destruction. Mackay proposes that Lyotard recognised the double effect of such acceleration. It intensifies the inquietude of the human subject in losing its role as master in the postmodern epoch (the first sense of the inhuman), but also leads to its hyper-exploitation (the second sense of the inhuman) without emancipation. Instead, Mackay considers *Les Immatériaux* as a laboratory for a third way out.

Birnbaum and Wallenstein provide another reading of the resistance of *Les Immatériaux* by offering speculations about a sequel exhibition that Lyotard mentioned in his seminars (provisionally entitled *Résistances*), which was never realised but which would supposedly have conceived resistance in terms of “noise, distortion, and the dimension of experience that resists both consciousness and language”. Birnbaum and Wallenstein’s text aims to reconstruct this notion of resistance by going back to Lyotard’s earlier writings on concepts such as touching, event and passibility. Birnbaum and Wallenstein also locate the concept of resistance in Lyotard’s writings on aesthetics, and in his interpretations of the work of Karel Appel, Sam Francis and others. Their text resonates with those of Hui and Sejten on Lyotard’s search for a concept of anamnesis that would break from the traditional conception of the relation between technology and memory.

This book derives from a research project that began in the summer of 2013 at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg. The aim of the project has from its outset been to provide an historical account of both the art and theory of this mysterious exhibition, *Les Immatériaux*, 30 years after its occurrence. Given the significance of *Les Immatériaux*, this publication is only the beginning of a reconstruction of the epochal transformation of these past decades. We would like to thank Leuphana University and our colleagues at the Centre for Digital Cultures for the opportunity to work on this important project, especially Claus Pias, Timon Beyes, Tina Ebner, Mathias Fuchs, Erich Hörl and Andreas Bernard, who have provided valuable support throughout the last two years. The funding of our work was provided through the *Hybrid Publishing Lab* and the research group on *Art and Civic Media* in the *EU Innovation Incubator* project of Leuphana University. In Paris, our research has been made possible by the Centre Pompidou and its staff, where Nicolas Roche, Didier Schulmann, Jean Charlier and Jean-Philippe Bonilli were more than helpful in giving us access to the resources in the Archives. We are also grateful for instructive conversations with Jean-Louis Boissier, Thierry Dufrêne, Anne-Marie Duguët and Bernard Stiegler. At Meson Press, Mercedes Bunz, Marcus Burckhardt and Andreas Kirchner have made the publication possible. We would like to extend special thanks to Madame Dolores Lyotard for generously granting us the copyrights of the unedited text of Jean-François Lyotard, and to Robin Mackay for the translations from the French. We also would like to thank Damian Veal and Thomas Munz for their diligence in correcting and cleaning up the manuscript. Last but not least, we would like to thank the authors for their contributions and discussions. Together, we will take it from here.





# **PART I: DOCUMENT**



# After Six Months of Work... (1984)

Jean-François Lyotard

After six months of work in partnership with the team at the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI), and with one year to go before the opening of the exhibition entitled *Les Immatériaux*, I would like to take stock, firstly by making a few clarifications concerning the conception of this exhibition, then by setting out the question of installation as we have collectively thought it through, and reporting on our intended responses to the question of installation, or at least their general direction. Those are the principal points that I would like to cover here.

The initial title of the exhibition, as stated in the plan of the Centre Georges Pompidou, was *Les nouveaux matériaux et la création* [New Materials and Creation]. Such a title obviously brings with it a whole way of thinking, a whole horizon of thinking which we might set out as follows: in making a very fine-grained analysis of natural givens, intelligence arrives at certain elements; it synthesises these elements, it reorganises them, aided by the creative imagination, and in this way engenders hitherto unknown objects. And the philosopher, when he scans this horizon, recognises the figure of modernity, which is perpetuated in the form of a subject that is intelligent, imaginative, and voluntary, a subject that takes hold of a world of given objects and analyses them – that is to say, a subject that reduces them to their finest, most imperceptible elements, and proves his mastery of these givens by creating from these elements completely new tools, new materials, new matter, even.

By calling the exhibition *Immatériaux*, we had, if I may say so, a number of claims in mind. Firstly, we must understand materials in a broad sense, as we have already written, extending the meaning of the word material [*matériau*] to also cover referents [*matières*], hardware [*matériels*], matrices [*matrices*],



and even maternity [*maternité*]. Tracing the common origin of these terms to the sense of the root *mât*, which means both measurement and construction, we tried to rethink everything that the modern project, the project of the figure of the subject I just mentioned, tends to treat as a sort of passivity to be conquered, as data to be analysed. That is to say that I would like personally, in my capacity as a philosopher, to give the word “material” a philosophical pertinence that necessarily exceeds the sense of the word as it is used, for example, by the architect or the painter. If in saying “material” I also understand something as maternity – that is to say, as origin – then obviously I am posing a problem, that of authentication – a problem of authority, a problem of beginnings; and from that point of view, the term “material” immediately raises a question that is generally not considered in relation to the figure of modernity – precisely that of the intelligent, imaginative, and voluntary origin which exerts its domination, its hegemony, its mastery, over what is given. That is the first point. Of course, by distinguishing between content [*matière*], hardware [*matériel*], matrix [*matrice*], maternity [*maternité*], and support [*matériau*], we seek to redistribute the term “material”, which as a term remains rather vague with regard to certain extremely precise and specific functions that are generally distinct for the communications engineer, for example, but also for the linguist and, probably, for the philosopher. This is why, in the first project plan connected with this exhibition, we took as a reference-point the model of the structure of communication that distinguishes between the sender and the recipient of a message – which already gives us two instances – but also the code in which this message is written – a third instance – the support upon which it is written – a fourth instance – and the referent of the message – a fifth instance. It seemed to us that we could distribute the different roots of *mât* in accordance with this structure of communication in a way that is necessarily arbitrary yet convenient, one that would give us a sorting mechanism for the enormous amount of things that the subject demanded we deal with. Thus we decided that the sense of *maternity* obviously belonged to the role of the sender, the sender being the father or mother, as you wish, of the message. As for the word *content* [*matière*], on the other hand, if we follow the usage that is common in high schools, colleges, teaching establishments, and libraries, when we speak of content we mean what the message is about, the matter of which it speaks – that is to say, the referent; thus content becomes referent, content comes under the pole of the referent – when we speak of content in the communicational structure, it is the referent pole we are discussing. Similarly, *matrix* [*matrice*] can be identified, a little arbitrarily, yet not insignificantly, with the code in which the message is written, and *hardware* [*matériels*] are the means of transmission of the message; the hardware is the way in which the message is carried, transported from sender to recipient; these two are therefore devices for the transmission and capture of messages, whatever they may

be. And then the *support* [*matériau*] proper can be identified with the material medium of the message – that of which the message is made. Distributing the different senses of the word *mât* in accordance with the structure of communication in this way, we have at our disposal a way of filtering out what will interest us in the exhibition, of choosing what will be pertinent in relation to our problem.

We must of course emphasise the fact that, in taking this communicational structure as a paradigm and at the same time as a filtering mechanism for what we want to show, we have accepted the hypothesis that belongs specifically to modernity, namely that every given is a message. What I mean is that if, for example, we take the case of architecture, and think about it in terms of this structure of communication, we are saying that, for example, the building, or this room, is itself a message, that this message has a sender, that is to say that it is engendered by a maternity [*maternité*], that it has an author who authenticates it; that it aims at a recipient and therefore that it can be grasped in specific ways by specific hardware [*matériel*]; that it is in some way inscribed in a support medium [*matériau*] according to a code that is its matrix [*matrice*]; and finally that this building has a referent [*matière*] – that is, it “speaks” of something. The same would apply if it were a question of a painting (to stay within the domain of the arts), but also if it were a question of a light signal emanating from a sun many millions of light-years away; and it would be the same if it were a question of mutant bacteria in a biochemical laboratory – these, also, would be treated as a message. This is an idea that has become commonplace. It is closely linked to the very idea of modernity, for it is evidently only at the cost of making every given a message that the hegemony of the intelligence, will, and imagination of the subject can be applied to a given, for this application means very simply that the given must be understood as a sign, and thus as referring, and as being immediately integrable into language. Basically it will always be a question of asking: What does it speak of? How does it speak? What does it speak with? What speaks and what does it speak to? Presupposed in the very idea of modernity is the idea that everything speaks, and that it is enough, in short, to find the constituent elements of the message, since it is these elements that are given by the structure of communication itself. The message is controlled and controllable once all of these instances have been defined. In this sense, then, there is nothing new here in relation to the modern project, but a rather precise way of stretching the meaning of the word “material”, like a sort of fabric, in order to draw it, to stretch it over the structure of communication which is, to my eyes – and I believe that we all agree on this now – the very figure of modernity in its treatment of what is given.

But as you have obviously noticed, we do not say “material”, we say “immaterial”. And when we say immaterial, we obviously mean something

extremely precise: that the contemporary situation – which of course remains to be described – this project of modernity which extends its communicational web to the totality of all possible givens so as to be able to control them by way of translation; in short – since it is a question of translation, a question of the message – that this project is realised fully in the contemporaneity in which we find ourselves today, and which I characterise essentially on the one hand as technoscientific, and on the other as historical – though we may come back to these two points; that this project, then, linked to these structures, is fully realised; but that at the same time this very realisation, this completion of modernity, destabilises the figure of modernity and that, by dint of its very perfection, it arouses disquiet. In particular, the negation *im-* in “immaterials” indicates the situation of a face-to-face, a confrontation that opposes the subject, the subject of will, of spirit, of the gaze, to that which is not him, and which falls under the general denomination *mât*. This face-to-face situation, then, is undermined today. It is undermined not only, as I have said, by technoscience; it is undermined by what I just now called *history* – that is to say, by a sort of chagrin which, in the twentieth century, has replaced the hope that had been opened up by modernity in the strict sense at the end of the eighteenth century, two centuries ago. This chagrin is what I would call the contemporary historical sentiment, insofar as, certainly, most of the hopes of the Enlightenment era – which were not solely technoscientific, but also political – are, I would not say thwarted, but in any case unfinished – this is the object of a discussion with Jürgen Habermas concerning the completion or otherwise of this project of modernity. What I want to say is that, precisely because it results from this project, in a sense not only does technoscience upset and undermine that project, but that in the order of global politics for the last two centuries, the idea of an enlightened, luminous society, a society transparent to itself, whether we call it a socialist or liberal society, it doesn't really matter, has receded considerably for us today – and this is what I call chagrin. And in this sense, by calling this exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, we mean, among other things, that it is a question of contributing to a sort of work of mourning for modernity. We must mourn for modernity, or at least certain aspects of modernity that today seem illusory or dangerous; and we must propose this precisely on the occasion of a reflection on the structure of communication and on its pertinence to the contemporary context. I would say, to jump ahead a little, that what is striking in this completion of the modern project, this hegemony over objects, which at the same time is a destabilisation of the modern project – what is striking is that, on the technoscientific level, we see a sort of reinforcement, an exaggeration almost, of the intimacy between the mind and things. For example, the software that is coming into general use on all scales is mind incorporated into matter; synthetic products, polymers for example, and all such chemical derivatives, are matters that are a result of knowledge – they are instigated by the mind.

Biochemical, or more precisely, biogenetic manipulations, genetics, show that the mind itself, in its most intimate properties and characteristics, can be treated as matter, because it is matter. When modernity presupposes that everything speaks, this means that so long as we can connect to it, capture it, translate it and interpret it, there is no fundamental difference between data and a phrase; there is no fundamental difference between a phenomenon of displacement in an electromagnetic spectrum and a logical proposition, and given this fact, in this face-to-face relation to a universe that is his to dominate – a heroic relation, I would say – in order to make himself the master of it, man must become something else entirely: the human subject becomes no longer a subject but, I would say, one case among others, albeit a case which retains this privilege, until proven otherwise (which is extremely improbable): that we can well imagine that there is no similar case in the whole universe, subject to a complete inventory being made. Yet it is just one case among the many multiple interactions that constitute the universe. You see that, from this “immaterials” point of view, we have emphasised – and this is a part of the work of mourning – a kind of counter-figure that takes shape within the figure of modernity, a counter-figure within which man does not play the role of the master. One might call this figure postmodern, insofar as it has always been present in modernity, but it might be the very completion of the technoscientific project of modernity. And as this project is destabilised, it allows this counter-figure to appear more clearly than before. I would say that we could call it postmodern insofar as this counter-figure brings with it a sort of disappointment in regard to the project of domination, and that it consists in mourning it; but I would say that this makes the figure rather cheerful because, once mourning is over, then happiness comes. But of course this counter-figure is uncertain. And above all, I would say that what this exhibition is interested in – probably the most important thing – is that we know very well that there was a metaphysics corresponding to the technoscience of domination, which was the metaphysics of the subject, the metaphysics of Descartes and of all thinking of the subject up to and including the twentieth century; but that we are not sure what kind of metaphysics could be appropriate to the technoscience of interaction. Not only what metaphysics, what thought, but also what politics, since it is easy to see what the politics of the subject corresponding to the technoscience of domination was: precisely the politics of state power, I would say. If not that of the totalitarian state then in any case that of the hegemonic state – a state that, moreover, allows, before its very eyes, the development of capital as the truth of the metaphysics of will and domination. But this metaphysics is becoming less and less pertinent – I think many scientists are aware of this – for contemporary technosciences and contemporary politics alike. I don’t mean to say that the hegemony of the state and of capital has disappeared – far from it, alas – but that in a certain sense it was already destroyed, that we no longer expect any good, any justice,

from these figures, and that, consequently, it falls to us to find a thought and a practice within the framework of the technoscience of interaction – one which, in short, would break from the thought and the practice of science, of technology, and of domination. And in a certain sense, it is this formidable problem that *Les Immatériaux* tries to pose. More formidable yet would be the claim that, in this exhibition, we have to pose the problem that is linked to postmodernity – that is to say, the question of what kind of political power is compatible with a generalised figure of interaction.

Following these few clarifications concerning the project plan, and before tackling the question of its actual spatial layout [*mise en espace*], I would like to turn to some associations surrounding the term “immaterials” – and these are associations rather than analyses. For me, the word “immaterial” is associated primarily with the word “immature”, which is an English word, but one that is increasingly used in French. By immature I mean that, with this technoscience, as with this new politics in waiting, there is something childlike in our contemporary situation. Within the figure of modernity, childhood was a situation in which that which belongs to nature and that which belongs to culture – or rather, I would say, that which belongs to matter and that which belongs to language – is not yet dissociated, is indiscernible, indiscernibly combined, mixed. There is a sort of admixture of nature in culture and of culture in nature that is characteristic of childhood. Now, if there is indeed, as I said, such an intimacy of the mind and of matter in the new technology, then one might characterise the latter as placing humanity in a situation of childhood. To take an example from architecture, in the *Discourse on Method* a whole page – more than one in fact – is dedicated to a comparison between the construction of a rational method and the organisation and construction of a city. Descartes complains – or at least pretends to complain – that these cities were not constructed rationally but were made bit by bit, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, according to needs, according to demographics, invasions, the requirements of new trades, population growth or decline; and that all of this obviously leads to great disorder, whereas if a city could be constructed, as we would say today, to plan – that is to say first of all on paper – then we would see clearly in this city, we would be able to orient ourselves in it very easily; the method being, at least in this text, in Descartes’s eyes (at least this particular Descartes) something like a plan of domination specifying the procedures to be employed in order to master an object of knowledge. Well, in today’s situation, what is called the crisis of architecture precisely tends toward a kind of turning away from this idea, which was still that of the modern movement in architecture – that of an entirely programmed, entirely predictable organisation of architectural and urban space. On the contrary, this crisis consists in perceiving that the charm, what I would call the almost ontological beauty and value of Italian cities, comes from the fact that they were in fact constructed exactly in the way that Descartes complains of – in

a non-dominated way, always in close proximity to the event, an event that could be either the taking possession of the city by some prince of another city, or the accession to power within the city itself of a suddenly rich family, or else the necessity of opening a new space for popular representation – all of this means that the classes, for example, and the routes one finds through these Italian cities do not at all resemble the urban ideal projected by the King of France onto the Place Royale in Nancy or Charleville, or the Place des Vosges. There is thus a return to a type of architecture and an urbanism that is close to the event, which for us today seems like a sort of lost ideal, a lost model. All things being equal, it is against the same Descartes who is startled at the fact that one was a child before being a man, and who could not manage to think childhood, and who wished to overcome this childhood at the architectural and urban level through a complete planning of streets, of places, of dwellings – it is against him, in a certain way, that today's architecture tries to think when it tries to think, I would say, a child city, a city in which the "birthing" of the dwelling is incomplete, and continues to be incomplete. It is not made once and for all, and it is not a question of respecting a plan that has already been made. On the contrary, it is a question of allowing to happen what must happen – whatever happens – and of making a place for it within a space that is necessarily fluctuating. I am not saying that this is an ideal of the postmodern architecture that calls itself "postmodern", and which is infinitely more suspect; but in any case, I see very well how there is something far too mature in the architectural models of ... [word missing in manuscript] or of Le Corbusier, and how, on the contrary, what we need today is a child city, a child habitat in the sense that I just described, and in the sense that, for example, Walter Benjamin describes in his *Berlin Childhood*. So that is a first meaning associated with "immaterials".

Next I would like to associate a second term with this word "immaterial", the term of the increate [*incr  er*], or, if you prefer, the transitive. Let me remind you that the initial plan for the exhibition gave it the title "New Materials and Creation", but that we realised that, when we speak of creation, creativity, the creative society (as I have read recently, rather than consumer society), creator, and even CAD – computer-aided design, but we might also say computer-aided creation – we interpret the technological mutation with which we are concerned (and also the historical change – we must not forget that here) as being still, and only, modern; that is to say that basically we think that, on the occasion of this particular technological mutation, man continues to aim at the mastery of the world – and of himself of course – and that, having made one more step forward in the means of this mastery, this control, he effectively approaches the ideal of the creator. That this is a theological word only reinforces what I say, for if it is true that modernity starts with Saint Augustine, it is also true that it continues with Descartes. The difference between the two is vast and yet slight, vanishing, since it goes without saying

that both of them imply a creative origin – a maternity, to use the word I used before. The fact that this origin is called “God” in Saint Augustine and “ego” in Descartes is of no great importance, for in both cases we remain within the field of a thinking of a modernity which is that of a subject who creates his world, for the ends of the arrangement of this world and the enjoyment of this world, the enjoyment of knowing, of power; and that, fundamentally, if we think the new technologies under the category of creation, if we continue to maintain this idea as if all the new technologies did was to fulfil this desire, this infinity of modern will that is called creation, then I believe we miss something that is very important in this technological mutation, in this third technological revolution, as it is known – namely, I would say, the prospect of the end of anthropocentrism. In any case, this, to my eyes, is the prospect that we may look towards on the occasion of this transformation, this greater intimacy of intelligence and the world, of language and of things that the technologies in question yield: that the counter-figure inscribed in modernity – the modern counter-figure of modernity, that which precisely does not wish to follow the paranoia of the subject dominating the totality of the *mât* – may emerge. If you say creation, that means that you prohibit the other metaphysics that I evoked earlier: a metaphysics in which, precisely, man is not a subject facing the world of objects, but only – and this “only” seems to me to be very important – only a sort of synapse, a sort of interactive clicking together of the complicated interface between fields wherein particle elements flow via channels of waves; and that if there is some greatness in man, it is only insofar as he is – as far as we know – one of the most sophisticated, most complicated, most unpredictable, and most improbable interfaces. You see that what I am indicating here is, perhaps only for myself – and I apologise to my collaborators if so – that on the occasion of these new technologies, perhaps there is a decline of humanism, of the self-satisfaction of man within the world, of narcissism or anthropocentrism, and that an end of humanism may emerge. And I must say that for me it would be a great happiness in my latter years to observe the decline of this most miserable aspect of miserable modernity; not only because, as I have already said, this aspect has an extraordinarily high cost, in blood, in violence, in terror and death; but also because, philosophically, it is most impoverished. And if we really have to name names, then I would say that the metaphysics that may emerge through these new technologies would not be that of Descartes, but rather that of someone like Spinoza; or if you prefer, a metaphysics that would be more along the lines of Zen – not the Californian brand of Zen, but that of the great Zen tradition that is, for me, incarnated in that great Japanese philosopher, living in China, called Ehei Dôgen. This is what I mean when I say “interaction”. When I speak of interaction I don’t want to rehash that petty ideology that attempts to make up for the inability of current media to allow the recipient to intervene in what he sees or hears, and which then heralds interaction as a great triumph in

the reinstatement of dialogue between transmitter and receiver, which I find rather conceited – I have little faith in dialogue, for it, also, must be critiqued in relation to its very Platonic origins. When I say interaction, what I am thinking of is rather a sort of ontology of the endless transmission of messages which are translated by each other, for better or worse, as much as possible, and where man himself is not the origin of messages, but sometimes the receiver, sometimes the referent, sometimes a code, sometimes a support for the message; and where sometimes he himself is the message. This plasticity of humans means that this structure of communication today seems like something upon which identities can no longer be fixed: we can no longer say that in the structure of communication man is, for example, in the role of the sender any more than that of the receiver. With the advance of scientific research – but also literary, philosophical, and artistic research – it seems that he may occupy many places in this structure; so this is what I mean by “interaction”.

I would now like to move on to a new group of associations around the theme of time. The question of time will play a considerable role in the exhibition, as I shall explain later on. And the group of associations that I have in mind ultimately comprises, to simplify somewhat, two main tendencies which are perfectly contradictory. On one hand we are concerned with these new technologies, but also with the so-called postmodern society, in which we maintain a relation to time that comes from modernity, and which is the extension of the modern project of domination. Contemporary technologies and the contemporary way of life aim to exert man's mastery over time in the same way that the modern project aimed, and still aims, to exert man's mastery over space. I would associate the immaterial with the *immediate*, in the sense that mastery over time implies the abolition of any delay, and the capacity to intervene here and now. The other tendency (I shall come back to this point in a few moments), which is in perfect contradiction to the first one – and to my mind this contradiction illustrates very specifically the contradiction of postmodernity itself, which at once completes modernity, or at least extends it, yet on the other hand contradicts and overturns it – the other tendency in the relation of man to time today is that, precisely because of the importance accorded to domination over time, and the value of immediacy, man encounters probably more than ever his incapacity to dominate time precisely insofar as time is not a material. It is difficult to conceive of space without the bodies that occupy space, whereas time, on the contrary, can not only be conceived of but even experienced without any body occupying time; what occupies time is not bodies, and thus, in this sense, time is the form (to speak like Kant) *par excellence* – or the medium, if you prefer – of immateriality. In philosophy it used to be called “inner sense”, but obviously this is a term that we can no longer use today. I will return to these two associations – the association of immateriality with immediacy, and the counter-association of



immateriality with unmasterability. A first point: to master the object – what I have called “*mât*” – the mind translates the properties of that object, or at least those that are considered to be exploitable, and this is what the term “project” means: that the object is addressed in view of exploitation, that is to say in view of domination and usage. Therefore the mind translates the properties judged to be exploitable in language, algebraic language for example, and retranslates the equations obtained into geometrical properties – at least this was the way in which the modern project proceeded. Thus space – which is given spontaneously, naturally, through sight for example, but also through hearing – space received in this way by the corporeal human subject is replaced by a controlled space, one that is controlled via this procedure of analysis, a procedure of translation into mathematical language, and a procedure of synthesis that permits the re-translation of equations back into lines and bodies, a procedure for passing from arithmetic and algebra back into geometry and mechanics – this is a procedure already elaborated by Galileo and Descartes. If we follow the line of this procedure, the ideal pursued by this project of control and mastery in relation to time is the capacity to intervene instantaneously in the object’s behaviour. We will be able to say that the mastery of the object is complete if, as it evolves independently, the observer or the worker can intervene immediately in its behaviour, and intervene in such a way as to immediately carry out the task that the observer or the worker judges appropriate. This means that the analysis of the behaviour of the object, including unpredictable behaviour, and the synthesis of orders to address this object, must occupy the least possible amount of time. It is clear that cybernetics depends upon this principle, and that this is why telematics and informatics count time in nanoseconds today, and will soon count in picoseconds – 10–12 seconds – which on the human scale is close enough to what we call immediacy. Machines that work on such time-scales obviously make possible interactions in what we call “real time”; this is the case, for example, with the Sogitec 4X machine invented at IRCAM, which allows a composer to intervene in the production of synthesised music as it is listened to. I would say that this kind of procedure – one of immediate intervention – fully completes the programme of modern metaphysics, which is also the programme of capitalism – namely, to gain time, to lose as little time as possible. This means that the exhibition will have to show this conquest of time, as we say, and will have to do this across a great many apparently heterogeneous domains. For example, I think that we must use music as a guiding thread here, for reasons that are easy to understand, because it is an art of time, and it is therefore in music that, as if by accident, immaterials have developed most rapidly. But I would very much like, for example, to compare this musical research to financial research concerning the dematerialisation of money and the possibility of carrying out transactions that are almost immediate, transactions that completely do away with the usual

delays in realisation. This idea of immediate intervention is closely tied, as I have said, to the very project of exchange in general – the idea of abridging as far as possible the distance between the purchase of some goods and the remittance of the corresponding sum. I don't want to develop that aspect here; I just want to say that fundamentally the conquest of now – the conquest of the instant, of the straightaway – realises a model of immediacy that we find in what linguists call performativity. The classic example of a performative phrase is that of the chairman of a meeting when he says "I declare the meeting open". It is enough for him to say "I declare the meeting open" in order for the meeting to be open; that is to say that here we have an effectiveness that is immediate in the sense that the phrase itself *is* the effectiveness: it seems to describe a situation but in reality it brings it about; it brings it about with no further mediation – without someone else needing to carry out the order, for example. When we make a promise, it is the phrase itself that performs its meaning, and thus we can say that with the performative we find ourselves in immediacy *par excellence*. I would say that the modern project – and in particular the capitalist project, insofar as it is, obviously, linked to the model of exchange – is a project of the performative. It is a project of a time that is entirely at the disposal of he who speaks, and who is in a position to ensure the immediate effectiveness of that which is enunciated. The classical thinkers, in the ancient discussion, the "quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns", reflected on the biblical phrase "let there be light, and there was light", regarding this as an entirely sublime case of immediacy. It seems to me that this is precisely the project – or rather, the dream – of modernity; a dream which, moreover, is closely linked to that of sublimity: its dream would be to say "let there be the car, and there was the car; let there be petrol, and there was petrol". This, I think, is the idea that goes by the name of creation.

This model of performativity, which corresponds in a certain way to the conquest of the now, implies a sort of priority of language, or in any case a hegemonic predominance of oral language over written language: "I declare the meeting open" is only performative at the moment and in the place where it operates, in actual and punctual fashion; when you read in the minutes of some meeting, or in a novel, that the chairman has said "I declare the meeting open", it does not follow that in your space-time as the reader, some meeting is now open. The performative is always linked, obviously, to a particular space-time, to a here and now which are those of the performative phrase itself, and whose effectiveness is thus linked to the actual enunciation. Whence the importance accorded in the current problematic to orality; not only in the problematic, but, I would say, first and foremost in everyday life: the importance given to the voice over written language is well known to teachers and pedagogues; effects of neo-alphabetisation, of dyslexia, are produced by the predominant use of the telephone, of television, of sound film (I would also include tape recorders) – that is to say, materials that

transmit the voice in its orality, and which have real time effects. Film-makers speak of the reality effect; one might speak of a reality effect of time through oral language which, obviously, written language, language written in a book, does not have; for there is no effect of performativity upon the reader when he reads "I declare this meeting open", whereas on the other hand, if he hears it, he asks himself immediately what meeting has been opened. Perhaps these voice-transmitting materials, this precipitation that I have supposed to be taking place, without being able to attest to it myself, also account for certain changes in language through the loss or withdrawal of the written linguistic referent that might slow down important displacements in language use. Thus, from this performative model, this predominance of articulated language, there follows a sort of predominance of the general attitude of reading. By reading I mean not the decipherment of a text in the space that we call the page, but something a little different: when, for example, we query a server, on Minitel for example – let's take the simplest possible example – the server sends pages to the screen which we read and in which we seek the information we're after. This is an exercise in reading, we read page after page; but this reading, precisely, is not properly speaking a vision, not if we take vision in a strong sense. It is rather of the order of hearing; and as proof, I would draw your attention to the fact that a natural voice or a synthetic voice could very well transmit this readable message were we not able to read it. Of course this means that the text would be interpreted by an actor, by a reader – potentially by a robot reader – thus it is very much an art, but it is an art of time, of the same order as that of music. If, rather than a text, on the screen page or on any surface whatsoever, you have an image – this is what I call visible – it gives rise to a vision; and with something like that the voice – whether robotic or human – cannot reinstate the image for you; by reinstate I mean that when you see the image, you do not read it, you do not hear it. Of course the voice can speak to you of the image, but it cannot speak the image as it speaks a text. In this sense, the traits that form the synthetic letters of our system of writing are incomparable with the traits that form images, even those of so-called ideographic languages. And in this sense, I would oppose vision and hearing as image and language, and of course as space and time. In front of their screens, humans – contrary to what we might think – cease to be lookers and become readers – that is to say, essentially, listeners. In this way, we find ourselves confronting the opposition between the arts of time and the arts of space, I would say a practice of time and a practice of space – between, let us say, music and painting, in short. When I say between music and painting, I mean that voiced, articulated language and music and cinema are an art of time, and that when we pass from the pen and pencil to the keyboard for reading/writing, passing by way of the word-processor keyboard, which had already begun this mutation, we go from a mode that spatialises inscription – as is always the case in painting, and the first writing is a variety

of painting – toward a mode that temporalises inscription. This means that the signifier in this second modality is organised in a chain all of whose elements are not actualisable at once – in the blink of an eye, as we say – as is the case for an image, but only successively – or, as linguists say, diachronically. The screen pages themselves scroll, and when a writer works on a word processor – something that we are also including in this exhibition – the important thing, especially if he is used to working with a pen, is that this writer loses his manuscript page, he loses all the preparatory work where additions are inscribed; the emendations, erasures, and mistakes which are there together in the preparatory text all disappear and give way to a text that itself may also be preparatory, but which is potential – I mean that it is not there to hand, you can't put all the edited pages next to each other to get a view of the whole; you have to bring up one by one this or that past page which has been memorised in your machine. Instead of a preparatory text it is a potential text, a text that is a future text because it is in the process of fabrication, but one which, on the other hand, is more past than the manuscript is, because you can only recall it page by page, to revise and correct it. You cannot have it here, now, *en bloc*; it is never there, any more than a film is ever there as a whole. This also means that, at the keyboard and before the screen, we have an experience of time rather than of space. Bizarrely, this predominance of time signifies a sort of preeminence of movement over rest. Space as the site of inscription – above all the space of painting or of hieroglyphics, hieroglyphics in general – is linked to rest, time is linked to movement. The paradoxes of time are paradoxes of movement, and in a hegemony of reading, like that which I have just described very clumsily, we might say that space is itself but a particular case of time, that is to say that rest – the simultaneous grasping of a visual whole by the eye (a relative rest, since we all know that the eye is in fact very active and is itself always in movement, but the movement is not in the object, the movement is in the eye) – this rest itself is a particular case of movement. You can stop your screen-page to register it in a more stable, slower way, for example, to change speeds as one does with the procession of frames at the cinema; but regardless, the frame itself can only be taken as an extreme case of non-movement, the only universal case being movement (by movement, I repeat, I understand the movement of the object, by virtue of the same principle as in music, where it goes without saying that it is the movement of vibrations that constitute the object to be understood). Now, if there is no such rest to be grasped in these technologies – if, on the contrary, these technologies at once constantly record and utilise movement, and only movement – then it follows that in a certain sense nothing can be grasped in one go, nothing can take place at the same time. Vision can grasp an actual whole at the same time – at least this is a prejudice we have always had – whereas listening never happens at the same time: listening to a piece of music, even a short phrase, cannot take place all in one go. The phrase is not

present all at once. The very notion of the “blow”, in this regard – as in the expression “at one blow” – must be re-examined, since what we call the “blow” – if we wish to think it here as it takes place, for example, in reflections on internal time-consciousness – the “blow” of the arrival of a musical note for example, is an event, a temporal event: something happens. What is this something that happens? It arrives too soon and too late, meaning that, insofar as it is not there, it is not there, and as soon as it is there, it is no longer there as event, it is there as memory, immediate memory. One might say in relation to the event what Freud said about the traumatic event: a traumatic event is one in which our affectivity is struck and marked by certain dispositions – neurotic dispositions, for example, or certain phantasms – and, as Freud says, this requires two blows, not just one. It takes a first blow in which the event is impressed without being recorded, we might say, by the unconscious; and then a second blow in which, on the contrary, an analogue of the traumatising event makes itself known as traumatising when it is not so in itself, but only by analogy with the first blow. In this doubling of the blow lies the whole secret of the fact that time escapes us, that the time of an event itself escapes us, that we are immanent to this time that we cannot master, and that, in this sense, immaterials are both threatening as *imminences*, and at the same time are *unmasterable*.

I would now like to associate the term immaterial with another neighbouring term, that of the *unsexuated* or *transsexuated*; by this I mean that, in the contradictory notion of the immaterial, there is not only the attempt to show that, in these technologies and in this postmodern history, the voluntarist and perfectly materialist project of modernity turns back in a sort of dispossession of will and a dematerialisation of the object; but also that a sort of echo, a sort of consonance is produced in this reversal of the situation which, it seems to me, is specifically postmodern: transsexualism. insofar as transsexuals are in a relation to that referent [*matière*] that is sex. By referent [*matière*] I mean that obligatory reference of the message that is our body, above all our socialised body, in the sense that the body *qua* message teaches us something about sex, teaches us something about what sex we are, and where unfortunately one does not have any choice beyond that of being a man or a woman. Now, the phenomenon of transsexuality – which has of course developed thanks to the progress of medicine, which has developed on a superficial level insofar as we now see it taking place, but which certainly expresses a desire that is very old and very profound, a dream – this phenomenon of transsexualism certainly manifests the indecency of immateriality precisely in the sense that it denies the alternative “man or woman” in regard to the sexual significance of the corporeal message. Just as technology and immaterials are incredulous in regard to the opposition between subject and object, I would say that they also make us incredulous in relation to sexual difference. In any case, they allow this incredulity in regard to sexual difference to become visible, beyond

the equality of the sexes demanded by feminist movements. Wouldn't the true aim of these movements – or in any case the true postmodern aim – rather be the disappearance of the alternative, the transaction between the two sexes, the constitution of a sort of synthetic product? To understand what I am saying here one could do no better than to read a passage from Catherine Millot's book *Horsexe: Essays on Transsexuality*, which expresses what I want to say marvellously:

I shall call him Gabriel, after the archangel, in conformity with his desire to be pure spirit only. He was the only one to take the initiative of talking with me. Aware that I had already seen a number of female transsexuals, he phoned me one day to tell me that he wanted to meet me in order to get the truth about transsexuality straight. He feared that the others had misled me, and wished to rid me of my illusions, for he could not bear the idea of people "talking any old rubbish about transsexuality". He arrived wearing a man's suit (transsexuals generally prefer traditional dress; more informal clothes are sexually less marked), a goatee beard, and was unquestionably masculine in his bearing and his voice. Straight away he declared, "The truth about transsexuality is that, in contrast to what they claim – that their souls are imprisoned in bodies of the opposite sex – transsexuals are neither men nor women, but something else".

This is a quote from Gabriel. Millot adds that it is this difference that Gabriel wants to be accepted, then she lets him speak:

Transsexuals are mutants, different from women when one is all woman, and different from men when one is all man. I feel and I know that I am not a woman, and I have the impression that I am not a man either. The others are playing a game, they are playing at being men.<sup>1</sup>

Gabriel, she adds, has never felt like she is a man, but that it was because he was sure of not feeling like a woman that he was called a man. The unhappiness of transsexuals is that there is no third term, no third sex; and according to him, society bears the main responsibility for this bipolarity whose constraints transsexuals suffer from. I would say that – or rather, I will let Catherine Millot say it:

This aspiration towards a third sex is far more common than transsexual stereotypes would seem to suggest. Some female transsexuals stick to their manly pretensions, but in many cases this claim masks a hope of escaping the duality of the sexes. Transsexuals want to belong to the sex of angels.<sup>2</sup>

1 Catherine Millot, *Horsexe: Essays on Transsexuality*, trans. Kenneth Hylton (New York: Autonomedia, 1990), p. 129–130.

2 Ibid., p. 126.

I find this formula very interesting, and I would say that, in the semantic field onto which the term “immaterial” leads us, we also find this idea of transsexuality – or, if you prefer, angelism. And here I would not have to look far to find a whole mystical tradition that, in its own way, anticipated the medical tradition of postmodern transsexuality.

I would like to associate one last word with that of immaterials, and it is the word *immortals*, but I do not have the time to develop that fully here. I will just read a passage from that old classic, fundamental to the history of technics and of reflection on technics, Mumford's *Technics and Civilization*, where he writes the following – which has already been largely surpassed since this was written in 1934, exactly 50 years ago, but which remains all the more true for the new technologies:

Whatever the psychological reactions to the camera and the moving picture and the phonograph may be [these are the types of hardware <matériels> he is thinking about – J-FL], there is no doubt, I think, as to their contribution to the economic management of the social heritage. Before they appeared, sound could only be imperfectly represented in the conventions of writing [which brings us to the problems of inscription in space and time – J-FL]: it is interesting to note that one of the best systems, Bell's Visible Speech, was invented by the father of a man who created the telephone. Other than written and printed documents and paintings on paper, parchment, and canvas, nothing survived of a civilisation except its rubbish heaps and its monuments, buildings, sculptures, works of engineering – all bulky, all interfering more or less with the free development of a different life in the same place. [Here the accent is indeed put on the question of space – J-FL] By means of the new devices this vast mass of physical impediments could be turned into paper leaves, metallic or rubber discs, or celluloid films [we could add, of course, microprocessors and the chips – J-FL] which could be far more completely and far more economically preserved. It is no longer necessary to keep vast middens of material in order to have contact, in the mind, with the forms and expressions of the past. These mechanical devices are thus an excellent ally to that other new piece of social apparatus which became common in the nineteenth century: the public museum. They gave modern civilisation a direct sense of the past and a more accurate perception of its memorials than any other civilisation, in all probability, had. Not alone did they make the past more immediate: they made the present more historic by narrowing the lapse of time between the actual events themselves and their concrete record. For the first time one might come face to face with the speaking likenesses of dead people and recall in their immediacy forgotten scenes and actions ... Thus a new form of immortality was effected; and a late Victorian writer,

Samuel Butler, might well speculate upon how completely a man was dead when his words, his image, and his voice were still capable of being res-urrected and could have a direct effect upon the spectator and listener.<sup>3</sup>

You can see here how Mumford, precisely through the mediation of the immateriality of new materials, and on the other hand the immediacy of transmission, and particularly the transmission of the voice, rediscovers what we have said in regard to time, within the perspective – which we have not spoken about but which must be developed further – of the relation between immateriality and immortality. And I would add, to complete this field of free associations, that no doubt we should straightaway associate immortality and the angelism of which I just spoke.

Now I will address a second part of this reflection on the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, dedicated more directly to the problem posed by what is called the spatial layout [*mise en espace*] of an exhibition; what we might call its installation. The contract I signed provides that at the end of this month I supply a synopsis, if only a provisional one, of the exhibition. Synopsis, in Greek, means that one has an overall view of what one plans to do. With this principle of an overall view what is presupposed is that the designer of the exhibition is in a position to bring into view the totality of what he has conceived, to show it at one blow; to give it to be seen at one blow to its recipients. We can see that the very concept of synopsis poses a problem, given that I have associated time and succession with the notion of immaterials that I have been constructing. For if it is true that what is characteristic of the relation being established between the *mât* in general and the mind is that we cannot expect the self-evidence of immediacy at one blow, while the synopsis falls under this delay, this ... This is something we remarked upon very quickly once we started to approach the question of realisation, the passage from conception to spatial deployment. It was fundamentally impossible – this is what we quickly understood – to hold to the traditional nature, that is to say the modern nature, of the exhibition. Exhibition [*exposition* – also “exposure”] or manifestation [*manifestation*] are obviously eminently philosophical terms. They mean that things are posited here, on the outside, in their manifest aspect. And there is a relation implied in this concept of exhibition, the relation of a subject who visualises objects, works, who confronts them, who looks at them face-to-face, with this visualisation – that of those who have conceived the exhibition – controlling it through the spatial layout itself. Thus on the part of the recipient who is the visitor, there is the principle that he is foremost a man who looks, an eye. What is more, this is an eye that is in movement over a body, an eye that wanders, and therefore one that exists in the general register of what were called promenades in the eighteenth

3 Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), p. 244, and 246.



and nineteenth century – what we could call tourism, without seeking to distinguish between the two at present. So this is what is presupposed on the part of the recipient of the exhibition. As for the sender, of whom is demanded the synopsis of this exhibition, what is required is ultimately that he anticipates, on paper at least – that he projects – this visit of the recipient, thus showing that its spatial layout will be made in such and such a way, and that it can be guaranteed that the visitor will conduct himself in such and such a manner, and that therefore the results of this wandering – of this promenade or this tour – can be anticipated. This means that the wandering eye will reconstitute the movement of conception once it is installed – that is to say, laid out spatially. You can see that this presupposition, inscribed in the very term “synopsis” or “exhibition”, is something that is handed down to us from modernity: the first great public exhibitions take place at the end of the eighteenth century, and salons and galleries are the characteristic spaces of these public exhibitions, which will subsequently proliferate during the course of the nineteenth century, with the Republic. What we have to see is that these spaces are characteristic of modernity for many reasons.

Firstly, the eye, as it is thought in the synopsis or in the exhibition in general, is the eye of modernity, as it was established during the fifteenth century. It is a matter of rendering each object visible to this visitor’s eye in a window – I would even say *as* a window, or at least as what one might see in a window or through a window. I thus designate somewhat summarily what fifteenth-century Italian painters called the *veduta* – that is to say, the view onto the vista of a landscape. All the windows to see, or through which to see, are organised into a façade, they are collected in a façade, an internal façade as in the case of the Louvre’s Galerie du Bord de l’Eau. It is not the façade of a house, it is the equivalent of the façade of a house but *inside* a house. That is, the gallery in its very construction is like a road within a building, within a palace—a road which, through the works shown, initially and essentially perspectivist paintings, opens onto an outside. Which means that the eye wanders as in a street, but what it sees through the windows are not scenes that it might see in the street. The visitor is on the inside, he is protected from the street – that is to say, from what we call reality. But this is no dream either, for in the dream there is presumably no window, there is no window at all; oneiric space is not fifteenth-century-type visual space – not a scenic space, at least. And it is not a dream because, in principle, the space of Italian Renaissance painting is not troubling in any way; on the contrary, it aims at a fairly easy recognition of what is in question, of the scene or the characters of the place or even of the moment concerned in this painted scene. I would say rather that the multiplicity of windows constituted by paintings hung on the walls of the gallery opens onto landscapes, portraits, situations, objects; and all of this forms not reality but culture. Basically, all the scenes of culture – or in any case a large number of them, a large number of these

scenes – are presented through these windows which are paintings, hollowed out fictively on the wall of the gallery. And the function of this exhibition – of this exhibition which contains in itself the principle of being exhaustive, and which, also, is an *ex-hibition* [*ex-position*] because it is on the outside of the gallery in the fictive space opened up by the frames – has a function that is inverse to that of the dream. The imaging function of the exhibition – and this, moreover, is why this space is privileged – is to identify, to permit the visitor to identify his belonging to a culture, to identify objects and to permit identification through the identification of the objects presented. I will add that, insofar as it is a question of perambulation, it is a question, as we shall see, of a sort of educational journey. But before talking about this, I should like to clarify something else: what is visualised – staying with the modern space of the exhibition still – are fragments of stories that are identifiable because they are a part of culture. The exhibition allows for a sort of apprenticeship of recognition, of characters, of places, of artists, of that which is presented and of the visitor; an apprenticeship in culture for the visitor in the exhibition. And I would say that this model, this type of auto-identificatory visual machine that is the exhibition, finds its complement or its reciprocal inverse in the modern street, which is also conceived as a gallery – unlike what is the case in a village, for example. The street is conceived as a gallery, the shop windows of the modern street are like picture frames which in their turn give onto landscapes, portraits – scenes which, what is more, just like in the gallery, permit identification. A little surprise, a little identification; a quick surprise, obviously elicited with a commercial aim in mind – which is not exactly the case in the gallery – or at least not always. Into this kind of urbanity, which is an urbanism of the façade, one can, quite obviously, introduce an aesthetic of shock, of the shocking – something that tends toward surprise and destabilisation. From one vitrine to another there are going to be shocking things, and placing things into vitrines can itself make for a certain surrealism. And here I would say that, for example, when we say “shock”, we cannot but think of Walter Benjamin’s outline of an aesthetics of shock for modernity, following Baudelaire. In certain regards we could specify how, presumably along with postmodernity, this aesthetic of shock, this aesthetic of sublimity through shock, which is kept intact in surrealism ... but that is another question.

I can now come back to the second aspect of this type of classical schema, which is in fact a modern schema, of the exhibition – the schema-type of the modern exhibition: perambulation. I have said that there is an eye, an eye in movement, an eye that walks. This perambulation is very important because fundamentally it obliges the designer – the one who is going to make a synopsis – to ask himself the question: What is it to walk in an exhibition? Where is one going? One is going toward the exit, okay, but can one get there in various ways, or via one single path; and what does the exit mean? This is a rather important difference from the street, where the analogy must

end, for the street only ever opens onto another street. There will probably come a moment when, from the street, one passes into the countryside – an extraordinarily interesting and bizarre moment, in fact; but one that is increasingly postponed and which, moreover, in contemporary cities and metropolises, is probably evaded rather than postponed. Which is why streets in cities, and in the suburbs of metropolises constructed in the '30s and '60s, resemble galleries rather than towns. In the modern city, the street leads to the street; in the gallery, walking leads to the exit; one exits the gallery when one enters the street. One goes from the street to the gallery, from the gallery to the street; one goes from one's home to the street and from the street to one's home or to another home. Thus the question of knowing what one does when one walks through the gallery is, of course, a very worrying question for someone who has responsibility for presenting a synopsis. One might be tempted to say – taking up again the analogy of the road and the gallery (despite the differences I have just mentioned) – that the gallery is like a rational street, a utopic street. It is a street insofar as it is a series of façades on the left and right of the visitor, with openings onto fictive spaces which are both cultural and identificatory spaces; but it is a street ordered, for example, according to a historical order, as is the case in museums, or according to a pedagogical order, as is the case in exhibitions – and very often both at once. Which means that the visitor's body traverses the spaces and situations that are shown; he proceeds through them – or, ultimately, his eye proceeds through them – as one proceeds through a course of study. This traversal is like a course, a kind of programme of education. In general I believe that the commissioners and directors of the exhibition, whether consciously or not, take as their aim the education of the visitor; and that in this sense, the gallery is a teaching establishment that one goes through faster than a teaching establishment; it is something like a training film, except that the objects are generally immobile and it is the viewer who moves. But if this is the case, if it is indeed a model street, a street that leads not toward the countryside but toward the heart of culture, a street that goes towards "downtown", toward the centre, then this is also characteristic of modernity insofar as this traversal, which may be long, winding, and even labyrinthine, constitutes a sort of model of modernity itself. This is already the case in the picaresque (especially Spanish) novel, and of course in the *roman de formation* at the end of the eighteenth and during the nineteenth century, and the modern epic in general – and also, of course, the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of culture, the novel of adventure, the travel novel, which develops in the sixteenth century, which is entirely marked by modernity, and which fully flourishes in England, in Germany, in France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This novel is typical of modernity: a subject goes through an experience, and is educated in going through this experience; he is educated by what he experiences, by his experiencing of the situations he goes through and by what he has

experienced. The “formative experience” is a fundamental form of the expression of the project of modernity.

Here I would like to open up a sort of parenthesis which will make for a transition toward what I want to say in regard to the spatial layout of our exhibition, *Les Immatériaux*, having set out, rather abruptly and insufficiently, this sort of model of the modern exhibition. I would thus like to take a detour, to open, in short, a digression, to make a little detour toward someone who, in his description of exhibitions, contributed powerfully to undoing their controlled space of modernity, of the dominating gaze and the edifying organisation. I am thinking of Diderot’s *Salon*, and in particular the *Grand Salon* of 1765 and 1767. What I would like to retain from these salons, above all that of 1767, is a most significant turn in which I believe the modern space of the gallery or the salon or the exhibition is meticulously and secretly attacked. It is the turn whereby, when he describes a whole series of paintings by Vernet in 1767, Diderot represents them as if they were real sites. He calls them sites, not paintings, except for the last one, for a very precise reason – just as if they were real sites in which he was walking. So that, in principle, we are still in the salon that Diderot describes, before the paintings, but the writer’s expression is such that it seems that we are taking a sort of promenade, a journey, a tour which Diderot takes with a character, an Abbé, and his two students, in real places; so that Vernet’s landscapes are described as realities. Diderot tries to show that precisely no painter, including Vernet – at least this is the Abbé’s objection – could equal the beauty of the real landscapes of these sites. So we find ourselves before the dematerialisation of the painting, of Vernet’s paintings, and the realisation of what they represent, that is to say the sites that they make us see, as if these sites were real. And ultimately we observe an exchange of roles between nature and painting. It is nature that is the author of the sites that Diderot and his friend the Abbé visit, whereas we know that it is the painter Vernet who is the author of these sites, in the form of the paintings that Diderot visits in the exhibition. Diderot begins this passage as follows:

*Vernet:* I’d inscribed this artist’s name at the head of my page and was about to review his works with you, when I left for a country close to the sea and celebrated for the beauty of its sites. There, while some spent the day’s most beautiful hours, the most beautiful days, their money, and their gaiety on green lawns, and others, shotguns over their shoulders, overcame their exhaustion to pursue their dogs through the fields, and others still wandered aimlessly through the remote corners of a park whose trees, happily for their young consorts in delusion, are models of discretion; while a few serious people, as late as seven o’clock in the evening, still made the dining room resound with their tumultuous discussion of the new principles of the economists, the utility or uselessness

of philosophy, religion, morals, actors, actresses, government, the relative merits of the two kinds of music, the fine arts, literature, and other important questions, the solutions to which they sought at the bottom of bottles, and returned, staggering and hoarse, to their rooms, whose doors they found only with difficulty, and, having relaxed in an armchair, began to recover from the intensity and zeal with which they'd sacrificed their lungs, their stomachs, and their reason in the hope of introducing the greatest possible order into all branches of administration; there I went, accompanied by the tutor of the children of the household and his two charges, my cane and writing pad in hand, to visit the most beautiful sites in the world. My intention is to describe them to you, and I hope that these descriptions will prove worth the trouble. My companion for these walks [that is, the Abbé] was thoroughly familiar with the lie of the land, and knew the best time to take in each rustic scene, and the places best viewed in the morning hours, which were most charming and interesting at sunrise and which at sunset, as well as the coolest, shadiest areas in which to seek refuge from the burning midday sun. He was the cicerone of this region; he did the honours for newcomers, and no one knew better than he how to maximise the impact of the spectator's first glance. We were off, and we chatted as we walked. I was moving along with my head lowered, as is my custom, when I felt my movement suddenly checked and was confronted with the following site.

*First Site:* To my right, in the distance, a mountain summit rose to meet the clouds. At this moment chance had placed a traveller there, upright and serene. The base of the mountain was obscured from us by an intervening mass of rock; the foot of this rock stretched across the view, rising and falling, such that it severed the scene's foreground from its background. To the far right, on an outcropping of rock, I saw two figures which could not have been more artfully placed to maximise their effect; they were two fishermen; one was seated towards the bottom of the rock, his legs dangling; the other, his catch slung over his back, bent over the first and conversed with him. On the rugged embankment formed by the extension of the lower portion of the rock, where it extended into the distance, a covered wagon driven by a peasant descended towards a village beyond the embankment: another incident which art would have suggested. Passing over the crest of this embankment, my gaze encountered the tops of the village houses and continued on, plunging into and losing itself in a landscape prospect that merged with the sky.

Here begins Diderot's discussion with the Abbé:

Who among your artists, my Cicerone asked me, would have imagined breaking up the continuity of this rugged embankment with a clump of trees? —Perhaps Vernet. —Right, but would your Vernet have imagined

such elegance and charm? Would he have been able to render the intense, lively effect of the play of light on the trunks and their branches? —Why not? —Depict the vast distances taken in by the eye? —He's done it on occasion in the past. You don't know just how conversant this man is with natural phenomena ... I responded distractedly, for my attention was focused on a mass of rocks covered with wild shrubs which nature had placed at the other end of the rugged mound. This mass was masked in turn by a closer rock that, separate from the first one, formed a channel through which flowed a torrent of water that, having completed its violent descent, broke into foam among detached rocks ... Well! I say to my Cicerone: Go to the Salon, and you'll see that a fruitful imagination, aided by close study of nature, has inspired one of our artists to paint precisely these rocks, this waterfall, and this bit of landscape. —And also, perhaps, this piece of rough stone, and the seated fisherman pulling in his net, and the tools of his trade scattered on the ground around him, and his wife standing with her back to us. —You don't realise what a bad joke you are making, Abbé ...<sup>4</sup>

Diderot's accusation against the Abbé, in this fictive dialogue which takes place within a supposed landscape which in reality is none other than the landscape painted by Vernet, the Abbé's "bad joke" consists in the fact that the Abbé suspects Vernet of having copied in detail a natural landscape which in reality is none other than a Vernet landscape. Thus here is an exchange of roles between fiction and reality, between creation and nature, as I said just now; but what is more interesting is that a rotation takes place between the instances of the structure of communication: the author of the text passes into the landscape that he is supposed to be describing, and in this landscape he holds a dialogue which speaks of this landscape as if it were real when it is fictive; and what is more, his interlocutor the Abbé speaks of this real landscape as a model absolutely inimitable by the very painter whom Diderot – the author of the text – is eulogising on account of one of his paintings which is this landscape. It's a rather simple thing ultimately, and yet it is remarkable insofar as the space of the gallery and of the exhibition in general is profoundly disrupted by it. For it is no longer an eye that perambulates before painted landscapes; it is all of a sudden a speech which jumps into the painted landscape, and which abolishes it *qua* painted landscape, for it is purely and simply abolished; and which, from this landscape taken as real instance, as place, as real space, speaks of the marvel, the sublimity of this landscape as if it were real, defying all painting to equal this sublimity. Thus here there is a sort of transfer from the function of the gaze to the function of speech. The exhibition is exploded, because the windows cease to be windows. Diderot

4 Denis Diderot, "The Salon of 1767", in *Diderot on Art, vol. II: The Salon of 1767*, trans. John Goodman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 86–88 (translation modified).

jumps through the window, installs himself in the fictive space represented by the painter, and in doing so defies all possible painting. That is to say that the truth is that, through the work of writing itself, Diderot no longer seeks simply to describe what the painter has painted, since he judges that in the end writing will never be able to equal nature at the level of description, that writing is an art of time and painting is an art of space, and that the two of them are incommensurable. On the contrary, Diderot, in his work of writing, tries to get across to his reader – for we are reading this – what the power of sublimity of Vernet's paintings could be for the viewer. Thus here we have a passage from the gaze – I would say an art of seeing and thus of space – to the ear and to an art of time; we have, fundamentally, the passage from Vernet's paintings to Diderot's writing, which, in a certain way, breaks open the space of the gallery of the exhibition, because this passage gives a new hegemony to the art of speech, of writing, which is an art of time. So that – as critics who specialise in Diderot have explained very well – this salon of 1767, and before it that of 1765, are already occasions for Diderot to experiment with writing as an art of time and thus as music. Fundamentally, Diderot thinks that one can equal the plastic power of Vernet only through a power, not at all of an equivalent framework of reference, but through a power of evocation, a power of expression that is equivalent in its order – and its order is the order of time, that is to say, the musical order. I would say that this rupture, which I cannot make a fundamental analysis of here, this rupture of the space of the modern exhibition in favour of something that will contain more of music than of the gaze, in a certain way not only announces Diderot's most postmodern texts, such as *Rameau's Nephew* and *The Paradox of the Actor* or *Jacques the Fatalist*, but also announces something that will destroy, within the city itself, the project of dominant modernity. In this writing experiment of Diderot's there is something that tends toward the destruction of a space of façades of mastery, of order: there is a sort of disorder here. Literary critics very often speak of this passage and of equivalent passages in terms of digression. There is therefore a sort of digression which is in reality a whole motif, a whole musical work, and a sort of hysteria of language which tried to provide, within its own order, an equivalent to the plastic power of the visual work. And I would add one more thing, which is that it is acted out, of course, and thus it implies a sort of coldness, for one can only do what Diderot does if one knows very well how to write, and thus if one is not oneself the victim of a blind propulsion. This is precisely how the paradox of the actor is announced, since the actor has to feel all passions, but at the same time has to feel none of them, in order to be able to reproduce those that he is supposed to act out. Which means that what becomes important for Diderot is circulation, exchangeability, the possibility of exiting from the rectilinear, orthogonal modern space, of leaping laterally into digressive spaces, and this at speed, as we shall see, for example, in the very constitution of the text called *Jacques the Fatalist*. The ruptures, I

would say the montages, between a story or a description, between a salon that takes place on the floor of the gallery and the story or the description that takes place in the fictive digressive space of the painting, this montage takes place without any warning, without any announcement, and thus, as film-makers say today, there is a cut and a crossfade. It is precisely here that we meet the theme of shock once more; but it is not shock in the same space and in the same time, but a shock that has taken place between one space-time – for example, that of the gallery – and another space-time – for example, that of Vernet's painted site, in which Diderot and the Abbé suddenly begin their discussion. I think that here we find the embryo, the sketch, already extraordinarily well developed, perhaps unsurpassable, of an aesthetics which is no longer the aesthetics of modernity, which is, to my eyes, a postmodern aesthetics insofar as it implies the disappearance of a common referent, of a shared space-time and, on the contrary, suggests a sort of heterogeneity or incommensurability between situations and thus between subjects. Because what interests me is that here it is not so much a matter of formative experience, and one does not gain so much in experiencing it; instead it is a matter of rendering oneself sufficiently mobile – the god that Diderot constantly invokes is Vertumnus, who, as we know, is characteristically unstable – it is a matter of rendering oneself sufficiently flexible and supple to be able to leap from one space-time to another. I am saying that here this speed – which is a theme that will be reprised by Stendahl and, of course, today, in the commentary of someone like Paul Virilio, but also by our very practice of time in contemporary capitalist and technological society – this speed is already something which, beyond modernity, announces postmodernity.

We must now describe, following the work of certain sociologists, this post-modern space-time, particularly – I would say essentially – in what today we still call the city. Here I follow the brilliant analyses made by Paul Virilio and Giairo Daghini, published in *Change International* no. 1 (December 1983). I will let them speak for themselves, so as to make it understood in what spirit we set to thinking through the spatial layout, or rather the space-time, of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*. Daghini writes:

[T]he city as form of development plays a fundamental role within what will come to be defined as the project of modernity – namely, the idea set forth by modern sciences of an indefinite progression of knowledge, the aim affirmed in the growth of capitalism of a limitless accumulation of riches, the revolutionary project or the idea of a progressive social and moral amelioration, as defended by socialist and communist movements from the last century onward. It is with this intent that the modern imaginary, what we might call the modern spirit, detaches and frees itself from former constraints, and from that positive idea of progress of which the city is the site. This city, in fact, in itself is one of the



fundamental objects of production, through accelerated urbanisation and industrialisation.

How else can we explain the enormous expansion, starting in the industrial revolution, of a process of urbanisation which holds itself to be universal, the burgeoning of the city into the *Grossstadt*, the inflation of the latter into the global city, and finally the appearance, analysed by Patrick Guetz already at the turn of the century, of urban concentration no longer having the form of the city, but that of conurbations?

These gigantic urban agglomerations which bring together many cities, and for which even the term "metropolis" seems inadequate, consist of numerous complex entities, and only appear as the highest point, or at least as the site of the gestation of the unfinished project of modernity, through an illusory effect. In reality, the continual mutation of their forms, the inextricable ramification of diverse speeds and orientations of development, the internationalisation of forms of central and centred power constantly modify the very paradigm of modernity and call it into question.<sup>5</sup>

And on the subject of this paradigm, Dhagini says the following:

It is not only the form of the city that is lost during the challenge which, in the '80s, becomes a long crisis; what also disappears is a mode of production, since a mechanical-industrial paradigm is on the way to passing into an electronic-nuclear paradigm.

Within this new paradigm the ever more frequent application of informatic procedures to the activities of labour leads to what we might define as a semiotisation of labour, that is to say a labour that is applied to and through signs rather than by way of the worker's direct manipulations of the machine. To semiotise thus comes down to coding, and coding means managing: the post-industrial metropolis of the '80s is thus presented to us by institutional theorists as one within which all activities are resolved into management. Simultaneously the new forms of treatment of space by means of the combined techniques of informatics and telecommunications allow the absorption of the "old" metropolitan concentration-standardisations; they authorise the decentring of the production into new establishments, new "cities". Still, the invisible networks of the informatic metropolis which decentre or centre by thrusting its terminals everywhere, do not at all end up in constellations of new *polises*, any more than they constitute new *Siedlungen*. So it makes sense to ask: What is this new space that is being constituted today through these "invisible

5 Gaiiro Daghini, "Babel-Métropole", *Change International*, no. 1 (December 1983).

networks", what are the societies that inhabit it, and the urban forms that represent it?<sup>6</sup>

This last question is, if we might say so, the very question that we ask ourselves in regard to the space of the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*: What is the new space that is constituted today through these invisible networks? Dhagini concluded his article by saying:

one thing is certain: once the system has changed, there is no point in making directional and coherent analyses with the logic of this system or with the logic of the project defined as that of modernity. On the other hand, we will have to work patiently and at length so as to grasp and to practice the characteristic logics of the systems in which we are immersed.

In a certain way this patience of which Daghini speaks is something that we as designers of an exhibition must also practise, insofar as we cannot respond too fast to the demand for a plan or for a project concerning this space of immaterials. I remember that, having had to be away from the team for a few months last autumn, I was overcome by a sort of anxiety, thinking that we ought at least to make some indication as to the spatial layout, so as to satisfy the demands of the project. This proposition was rejected unanimously by the team almost without discussion, without any argument – fundamentally rejected, as if the team understood that we could not get to the root of this problem of postmodern space through a rapid, controlled spatial layout of a plan for the exhibition. In his text, Virilio, for his part, extends Dhagini's question, or perhaps contributes an element of a response to him, you could see it either way: what we are seeing, he says, is a paradoxical phenomenon whereby the opacity of the construction materials is being reduced to nothing; thus, Virilio reflects here more precisely on the very notion of exhibition [*exposition*], since the title of his article is "The Overexposed City". I would be pleased if the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* could be called a *surexhibition* [*surexposition*]. Virilio says:

With the emergence of portative structures, curtain walls made of light and transparent materials (glass, plastics) are replacing the stone façade at the same time that the tracing paper, acetate and plexiglas used in project studies are replacing the opacity of paper.

On the other hand, with the screen interface (computers, television, teleconferencing) the surface of inscription – until now devoid of depth – comes into existence as "distance," as a depth of field of a new representation, a visibility without direct confrontation, without a face-to-face, in which the old vis-à-vis of streets and avenues is effaced

6 Ibid.

and disappears. Thus, differences between positions blur, resulting in unavoidable fusion and confusion.

And he emphasises what follows from this:

Deprived of objective limits, the architectonic element begins to drift, to float in an electronic ether devoid of spatial dimensions yet inscribed in the single temporality of an instantaneous diffusion.<sup>7</sup>

This I think speaks for itself, without any need for further comment from me. Further on, he adds the following:

Solid substance no longer exists; instead, a limitless expanse is revealed in the false perspective of the apparatuses' luminous emission. Constructed space now occurs within an electronic topology, where the framing of the point of view and the scanlines of numerical images give new form to the practice of urban mapping. Replacing the old distinctions between public and private and "habitation" and "circulation" is an over-exposure in which the gap between "near" and "far" ceases to exist, in the same way that the gap between "micro" and "macro" disappears through electronic microscope scanning.<sup>8</sup>

Virilio concludes this passage as follows:

The representation of the contemporary city is thus no longer determined by a ceremonial opening of gates, by a ritual of processions and parades, nor by a succession of streets and avenues. From now on, urban architecture must deal with the advent of a "technological space-time." The access protocol of telematics replaces that of the doorway. The revolving door is succeeded by "data banks," by new rites of passage of a technical culture masked by the immateriality of its components: its networks, highway systems and diverse reticulations whose threads are no longer woven into the space of a constructed fabric but into the sequences of an imperceptible planning of time in which the interface man/machine replaces the façades of buildings and the surfaces of ground on which they stand.<sup>9</sup>

As for the surface, in the same text a little further on we find the following definition: "Every surface is an interface between two milieus in which a constant activity prevails, taking the form of an exchange between two substances placed in contact with one another."<sup>10</sup>

7 Paul Virilio, "Une ville surexposée", *Change International*, no. 1 (December 1983), p. 19–22; "The Overexposed City", trans. Astrid Hustvedt, in *Zone 1–2* (New York: Urzone, 1986), p. 540–550: 544.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., p. 545.

With these few remarks we have, by way of urban sociology, an approach to what is necessarily in question for us insofar as we confront the question of the spatial layout of *Les Immatériaux*. It is very clear that the exhibition must take upon itself or take up for itself this space-time, a space-time without façade but with an interface, where surfaces are only interfaces – and Virilio and Daghini show us the extent to which these interfaces are essential to the new habitat.

The proposed model here is that of the conurbation, which the urbanised know very well, and which is characteristic of the great inhabited zones, for example, of the South Californian coast, which extends from the Mexican border to the north of Santa Barbara. The conurbation is neither the city nor the countryside; it excludes the opposition between downtown, city centre, and periphery or suburb; it comprises habitat zones and uninhabited zones – not only vague terrains within the city, as seen in the US and pretty much everywhere, but also hilly regions in which one thinks for a moment that one is in the countryside – deserted hills – when one is actually still in the city. This region, which in itself destroys the oppositions corresponding to the division between countryside and city and, at the limit, between nature and culture, suggests the analogy of a nebula, in the astrophysical sense – a mass of dust, a focus of energy forming matter, one that excludes the simple opposition between interior scenes, like living rooms, and modes of circulation, like lines of attraction bringing bodies together. This representation, which is that of classical modernity, will undergo an entirely radical critique – firstly, of course, with the theory of relativity, and then with the idea, the principle that matter is energy, and that the opposition between body and lines of force, for example, cannot be maintained. The same goes – or in any case this is an idea that should be developed – concerning the metropolis that I am trying to describe. There also the opposition between the stable – what I would call hardware habitats [*habitats matériels*] – and modes of circulation – fluidities, like the flow of vehicles, for example – disappears, since the habitats are ultimately only the nodes of circulation of the message, of the electronic message, of photonic messages and sonic messages, which themselves, moreover, are now also transmitted electronically – and of course these messages are far more elaborate than linguistic messages in general and affective messages, which remain to be elaborated at the level of the cosmic or cosmological metaphor I am trying to develop here. So these habitats are, as Virilio has just said, far more interesting *qua* very complex interface than *qua* interiors held within façades. This has already long been reflected, in particular, in the Californian architecture that Frank Lloyd Wright and his school implanted in this region. This is already nothing new, it is inscribed still under the sign of the project of modernity, but nevertheless, the decision precisely no longer to oppose material support [*matériau*] and ornament, to no longer conserve the opposition between inside and outside, but on the contrary, by

means of lighting and transparent surfaces, to place the interior outside and the exterior inside, the profound reflection of shadow and light – all of this already anticipated something that is attained not so much by means of a materiological research but from the sole fact of the predominance of new technologies in the habitat, in architecture and in urbanism. I would say that certain large metropolises – above all if they are not limited in their expansion by the structure of the modern city of yore, with its city centre, commercial, administrative, political centre, and then the various patches of the suburbs – this freedom which holds for the large Southern Californian metropolis which I already referred to, can fundamentally be thought far more easily in terms of the cosmic or cosmological model; but also in terms of a microcosmic model, that of a field of elementary particles which form a content [*matière*], which form a node at certain places of encounter, one which, moreover, is extraordinarily difficult to localise precisely because of the relations of uncertainty – that is to say that each time the observer tries to define the places of encounter of these particles, it is displaced.

If now I take this barely sketched-out model and transport it to the case of the exhibition, asking myself, therefore, what a postmodern exhibition corresponding to the metropolis or to the nebula of conurbation could be, then I am indeed obliged – and this is what we have all concluded – we are obliged to refuse the traditional *dispositif* of the gallery and the salon – that is to say, the *dispositif* which opposes, for example, rooms and the corresponding corridors, habitats and lines of circulation. To refuse the opposition between the central point, the preeminent point of the exhibition and the periphery of the regions, the most important zone, the most important room, and then the outlying rooms, just as the opposition between a downtown metropolis and the suburbs has disappeared. We must even question the relation between entrance and exit by virtue of the same principle, since it is very difficult, in a large nebula like that of South California, to say at what moment we have entered the city or left it. And we must also call into question and probably abandon the principle that there is a direction to the visit, that is to say that in it there is a polarisation of space and of time which means that one either goes toward the secret chamber of the temple where knowledge will be completed, or one traverses all of the rooms by means of the mode of circulation toward the exit, the exit being the end of the apprenticeship and the accomplishment of the initiation. All of these spatiotemporal arrangements, which are powerfully significant for the project of modernity, and which organise the space of the gallery, must be reconsidered if we do not want our exhibition *Les Immatériaux* to be contradictory and, I would say, in contravention of the very name of immaterials and with the very project of exposing some aspect of postmodernity. It must be not an exhibition [*exposition*], but a surexhibition [*surexposition*], to take up the term Virilio uses in relation to the city; it must be an overexposed exhibition. So these are a few

reflections on the spatiotemporal problematic that has preoccupied us, and which will have to be reconciled with a certain number of constraints, because we are not putting on this exhibition on virgin soil, within an untouched space-time. The fifth floor of the Centre is a surface of 4000 square metres, 2700 square metres of usable space if we discount the entrances and exits. It is a space without any partitions, which is a great advantage; but more importantly it is a space that cannot be made completely dark – this should be emphasised insofar as it is precisely a question of that still modern but already postmodern architecture of transparency, given that interior and exterior do not constitute a pertinent opposition here. On the other hand, this space is situated within the Centre Pompidou, in the very centre of Paris, a modern (I would say classical-modern) city, in a neighbourhood which, especially since the building of Les Halles, draws a crowd of visitors, particularly at the weekend, a crowd of people who come from the suburbs; this structure and this situation themselves constitute constraints. On the other hand, the exhibition is not a museum; it is an organisation of space which is temporary, not permanent; and we must include the duration of the exhibition – not only the entire period of the exhibition, but the duration of the visit itself – within the constraints bearing on the organisation of the fifth floor. I will leave aside questions of budget, which everyone can easily imagine, not because I don't want to talk about them but because in the case of *Les Immatériaux* we might think that what is new in the way the question of the budget is posed is that, firstly, the budget will be higher than usual for exhibitions on the fifth floor, because of the very nature of what will be presented – that is to say, technologically complex machines; and on the other hand, that the evaluation of cost is sometimes impossible insofar as we are dealing with the creation of original products. I would add that the very term that designates this space on the fifth floor, the very name of this space is the “Grande Galerie”. I am not saying that these constraints make the thing impossible – far from it. On the contrary, if we compare this relatively free space in relation to other spaces, the exhibition can only benefit from being there. Nevertheless, the *Immatériaux* project is rendered paradoxical by the fact of the central position of the site – that is to say that it takes place in a centre, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the establishment of which was indeed disputed at a time when decentralisation was the order of the day; that the supervising body of the exhibition is also a centre, the *Centre de Création Industrielle* (CCI), a centre of creation indeed; and that, on the other hand, the thing – that is to say, the exhibition – is rendered perilous by the fact that its philosophical nature, which is in any case reflexive, and the team's ambition as to what needs to be got across to the visitor, is not exactly tailor-made to maximise footfall. That is to say, the problem of the attendance of an exhibition that precisely will not be made to teach, nor even to show something, since it will not be a façade, and which is also not about marvels, in the sense that one might marvel at new

technologies, but whose aim, for the team in any case, is to question, and I would even say to disquiet, the idea of the will and intelligence of an all-powerful subject, in order to produce instead a sort of effect of modesty in the anthropological atmosphere in which we live – the problem is that it effectively risks ending up in failure. I think the whole team is perfectly aware of the risk we are running in treating the question in the spirit that I have tried to describe. This said, it is now time, not to specify the responses that we will try to give, on one hand, to this questioning of the modern project, and on the other, to the constraints of this space, but to sketch out certain responses that have come up along the way during this very absorbing work, in which the whole team is very much invested, because it is very disquieting – in any case, some local responses. Here is how we have decided to proceed: we adopted the communicational structure, and we decided to extend the sense of the immaterial according to the root *mât* and to distribute the different senses associated with this root, referent [*matière*], hardware [*matériel*], support [*matériau*], matrix [*matrice*], maternity [*maternité*], on the different axes of this communicational structure. With the use of the term “material” and the mediative prefix, we are not suggesting that there is no longer any material support [*matériau*], but we think that we are in agreement in questioning these different senses: Is there still in contemporary technologies and in history a place for something like a *maternity*, as if someone – nature, the world, God, the Great Mother, were addressing messages to we humans, recipients of these messages? Are there still media [*matériaux*] which are only media – that is to say, relatively indifferent supports that are made use of according to an independent project, like, for example, “brick architecture,” to use a term borrowed from our colleague [Alain] Guiheux? Are there *matrices*, that is to say codes which encode messages that we can decode? Is the hardware [*matériels*] for the transit and capture of messages itself stable? Is the very content [*matière*] of messages, that is to say their referent, that of which they speak, independent of these messages? You can see that here there are a series of questions which demand that we group the objects to be shown not into separate domains – that is to say by genre, as one distinguishes biology from cookery, painting, and industry – but on the contrary that we place these objects, that we group them by zone. Each of these zones will fall under the regime of a question of the type: What about the referent [*matière*]? In such and such a domain, whether it is astrophysics, biology, architecture, what about the support [*matériau*]? In such and such a domain, theatre, painting, or industry, what about matrices, what about hardware [*matériels*]? Thus we have been guided by this idea that what is pertinent are the zones corresponding to different questions bearing on the different senses of the root *mât*. We have been led already to this first implicit organisation, a prior organisation of the space, which would be an organisation by zone, grouping sites belonging to domains of different, heterogeneous genres, and whose homogeneity we will

demonstrate precisely through the simple fact that they will be interrogated in the same manner, on the basis of the root *mât*. A second idea is that we do not wish to have, and we cannot have, an overall view of the whole of this space. This means not only that the visitor himself will have no overall view, and that she will circulate immanently in this space, without being able to grasp, at least not immediately, its overall economy; but that even we, who are supposedly the designers or the creators of this space, we do not proceed via a prior division of this space. That is to say that we will not plan out this exhibition and then carry out the planned project, but rather set out from these questions, interrogate the different domains on the basis of these questions, and situate one by one each of the sites that seem necessary to us, those that are most pertinent in relation to these questions, in which, in this or that domain, the project of modernity may be disquieting in some way – on the axis of referents [*matières*], on the axis of matrices [*matrices*], or on the axis of maternities [*maternités*], and so on. And ultimately, in delaying the moment when all of the sites, grouped by zones, will come to cover the fifth floor of the Beaubourg. A third principle is that, if we want to be faithful to the spirit of immateriality, it is important to accord a considerable place to that which relates to time rather than that which relates to space; and that, in particular, we must not – and we see many advantages in not doing this – we must not issue the visitor with instructions, whether an instruction manual or an instructive pamphlet, that is, information booklets. We should use as few text panels as possible, since these are still of the order of inscription – as I have explained before, the inscription of the space – and instead should use the medium of speech, of sound, which belongs to the art of time. We have taken the decision to use an audio programme to cover each of the zones grouping together sites involved in different domains but belonging to the same problematic. For each zone there will therefore be a transmitter, which will be located in the space of the exhibition itself, and at the entrance each visitor will pick up a little receiver that he will wear over his ears so that, passing from one zone to another, the visitor will pass from one transmitter to another, and will thus receive an audio instruction that will be sent to him by the transmitter in question. Through the transmitter we plan to play a tape recording relating to the problems that govern all of the sites placed within the zone; in other words, the instruction will be oral, and this allows us to avoid having too many panels to read. It will also allow us considerable latitude in the nature of messages concerning the zones and the sites, because by using oral speech we can avoid the monotony of written explanation, which generally is of the order of instruction; we can envisage using citations, or textual creations, from completely different genres. We can well imagine poems, fragments of literary prose, instructions in the imperative mode, questions, exclamations, all of this being – at least this is our plan – read by a good, well-known reader, and thus making use of the specific power of speech.



Of course these same receivers could receive musical signals, whether these signals are mixed with text, or whether on the contrary there is an entirely musical zone, as IRCAM have suggested. Once more, the arts of time, oral speech and music, with all the intermediaries between the two, including noises, are much superior to reading. I would add that the interest of proceeding in this way is that – the exhibition space must be kept completely silent – each visitor will be isolated in a singular relation to the transmitters. So, to come back to the sites, these sites will be placed in zones which are transgeneric, trans-domain, these sites will be sometimes singular, sometimes comparative – that is to say, comparing a new industrial technology, for example, with a new artistic technology so that the visitors will be led to question what is supposedly function and what is supposedly expression. Others will be anamnesiac, that is to say that in the domain itself they will compare two states, for example of the question of referent [*matière*] and support [*matériau*].

And finally, the way in which the sites are linked to each other, as I have said, will be through the common problematic of referent [*matériel*], support [*matériau*], and so on. And the way in which the zones that cover each of these problematics will be linked to each other will remain – we are discussing this now – probably relatively loose, which leads us to think that the perambulation within these zones will be at least partly free, so that each visitor will have – I would not say the choice of route, the term “choice” is not satisfactory – but in any case will have the freedom to go here and there, a little according to chance, or his tastes or his momentary inclinations. It is not, properly speaking, a question of a labyrinth, since usually a labyrinth has but one thread, and is perfectly constraining. Instead it is a question – as we have been saying in the team – of a sort of desert in the middle of which these sites have been dropped, with the visitor going from one zone to another with her headphones on her ears. Perhaps, entering into a zone in the middle of the recording, she may wait until the tape goes back to the beginning in order to be able to listen to what the space is about, the region where she is, and will visit the zone in question with this recording, this text, playing in her ears.

Thus the linkage or the sequencing of zones to each other will, if possible, always leave open the question “What happens, what is happening?” and thus the feeling of a kind of contingency and encounter. I will add a last thing as a general principle: since we cannot make the fifth floor entirely dark, as is generally the case in the Beaubourg, we have decided to take the opposite path – that is to say, to overexpose the whole exhibition, to use constant halogen light and to control this light in relation to the external light so as to balance it. Thus we will have constant lighting whatever the time of day, which seems very important to me since it will be part of the extreme modernity or postmodernity to renounce nature in this way, to renounce the seasons, day

and night. What is more, it will allow us, when we feel the need, to create sites or even whole zones that, on the contrary, are completely dark, completely black, through a system of local enclosures. So this is how, at the moment, we imagine the whole of the exhibition.

I would like to add two things: on one hand, that we would like to find a device that would enable us to record the route taken by each visitor. Not to record it in some central server, but such that on the object that he will necessarily have taken at the entrance – it may be a cassette containing all of the recordings produced by the transmitters which the visitor could buy in some way, or it could be a card that he swipes in readers – such that, thanks to these indications one could obtain on demand, on exit, a report of the route that the visitor in question has taken through the space of this exhibition. This doesn't seem to be as easy as we had thought, and the difficulties may oblige us to choose a simpler solution, but nevertheless this aspect is being looked into. This means that each visitor will in a certain way take away the product of his own visit, printing it out using a printer at the exit. A second thing that I would like to emphasise again is that, along with this route, the work that you see here is not exactly a promenade but an investigation – I wouldn't say an adventure, I don't like that word so much – but in any case an exploration of the space of the exhibition. We also envisage completely revising the idea of the catalogue, because the catalogue of an exhibition is a book that has the exhibition as its content [*matière*], that is to say as its referent, and which tries to be as complete a summary of it as possible, in the form of, on one hand, a declaration of intent in the preliminary articles, in particular the commissioner's statement, and then an account of all the objects to be found in the exhibition, the index of these objects and their authors or creators. We should like to proceed in the following way: firstly, to separate it into two book-objects. On one hand we will have as the catalogue a portfolio, which was already started six months ago, the first proof of which some of you have already seen – so we will continue with this portfolio, in which we will include the team's working texts spanning almost two years; and on the other hand, obviously, an account of all the objects, whatever their nature, to be shown [*exposé*] or overexposed [*surexposé*]. It will be quite a large portfolio, then, one that will comprise a set of sheets along with two booklets, a booklet of working files and a booklet that will be a kind of lexicon of the exhibition, with illustrations, all of it in a cardboard sleeve like a box, a double box. You should realise that this is not a matter of making something nice and chic – we are not working on the model of a deluxe book. On the contrary the aim is to make an object that is quite plain, quite simple, with these loose-leaf sheets, and using printing and duplication techniques that do not go beyond offset printing. So that is one of two objects that you will be able to buy in the exhibition.

The other object is entirely different: it is a part of the exhibition itself, one of the experiments that are going to take place inside the exhibition. It would be wrong to call it a catalogue, in fact. It is a question of giving a certain number of people, whom I have somewhat derisively called "authors", a list of a certain number of words. These are words that we might consider as keys insofar as they will be inserted into a central server, but they are not keywords in the strict philosophical sense, if I might say so, but words that we have built up together and which we consider to be important in relation to the exhibition. So we have given these authors, for a period that remains to be determined – this is a matter of both material possibility and cost – word-processing machines. Each of them associates with the words that interest them around a hundred words, a few phrases which we call commentaries. They make a first commentary entirely freely – they are at home with their machine – and then, by calling up the names of the other authors using a code, they can learn what the others have associated with the same word, and then respond to what the others have done. So in the first place their own commentary, then a commentary which they can make on their own commentary, and then, thirdly, a commentary on the others' commentaries – all of this recorded in the memory of a central server. You can see that there is no necessity for the process to be synchronous, that is to say to take place in real time. These commentaries can very well be made diachronically, one after the other, it does not matter much; each can see the commentary of others when he wishes, in whatever medium. But in real time, one can imagine – even if it seems that here also there are considerable difficulties – the different authors responding to one another on their word-processing machines. The company that is responsible for dealing with this aspect of the exhibition has suggested that we could bring about – and as you can imagine, nothing would please me more – what we could call "sparring commentaries", not using word-processing machines, but via Minitel, the little device that is already in place in Paris, and which will be available for all of telephone users in 1985, which is a device with a keyboard and a screen using the telephone network. It may be possible, then, to make in this way a sort of sparring of commentaries where each author will be able to produce a phrase and any one of the others will be able to comment on this phrase – it is a question of a brief phrase that fits in one page on the screen. In that case we would have a production in real time, which would not be so costly since it would use the Minitel network. All of this would of course be available within the exhibition, and we envision that the visitors themselves could participate in this experiment as it carries on during the exhibition. This means that all of the work done by the authors on the word processors could finally, after having been printed, be produced as an experimental book in which it would be precisely the question of the author that would be at issue – Who would the author of this book be? – and in which the very multiplicity of the rules of the game – the author commenting on himself, commenting on others – would

ultimately make the question of the book's maternity particularly disquieting. Of course, the question of the support [*matériau*] would, by virtue of this simple fact, be posed with some force, since each of the authors working on the word-processing machine would be in the keyboard-and-screen situation that I described earlier. So there are a few different aspects to this. For now, we don't want to proceed with the description of the sites, although we could maybe do so if you feel the need.

I should like to add a few disordered remarks. This spatial layout which is in the process of taking shape will itself manifest, within the exhibition, many of the principles that I have described a little abstractly: firstly, the passage from one zone to another should be compared to the passage from one reception zone to another when a driver drives across a large metropolis. When you go from the Mexican border to Santa Barbara you have to retune the radio because you change transmitter; speech and music fade out and become noise, and you have to retune in order to find other speech, other music, you join them in mid-flow, and they are independent of each other. This nebulous aspect of which I spoke earlier, then, we hope to reproduce it through this device. A second thing I also want to say is that the multiplicity of routes through the exhibition – above all if we manage to resolve the technical question of being able to record them at will at the exit – allows it to transpire that, fundamentally, the exhibition contains many possible worlds. Ultimately, a route defines a world, that is to say that it connects up a series of zones, and another route assembles the series of zones into another order; and in this sense, each visitor will have a universe of the exhibition which is inscribed, of which he is the author, but the involuntary author – and of which he is also, one might say, the receiver, meaning that here there is a vacillation on the question of sender and receiver, and above all on the question of content [*matière*] – because it means that the very content of the exhibition, the exhibition *qua* referent of a route is posited: there are ultimately many exhibitions in one, many possible exhibitions. A third point: we can imagine, thanks to the recording, thanks to the freedom that the recording gives us, some very interesting variations in the pragmatic situation of the visitor, because she may sometimes be the receiver of the recording – someone addresses her and this someone, what is more, may be a person out of a painting, may be a piece of a machine, may be the site itself, or the zone, or another zone – she may be the receiver, then. But she may also be placed in the position of the sender, since, precisely, she herself plots her course, and in this sense she is the author of the route, the sender of the sequence that will be recorded at the end. She may herself be considered as a support [*matériau*] insofar as she is placed in the situation of a trigger – Pierre Boulez envisaged a scenario where, through a simple photoelectric cell system, the very passage of a visitor would trigger a piece of electronic music – perhaps at the moment when she passes into one place, she triggers off a camera to record her and

to represent her on a video screen elsewhere in the exhibition. Or again she may be the recipient, in the sense that she is active in this or that site. For example, we can imagine a site where we plan to use a set of synthetic images – which unfortunately risks being extremely costly – where the visitor could breathe onto a screen which represents the snow on a landscape, and by blowing on the screen she would make the snow fall. Thus, the visitor can play a great variety of roles within the structure of communication that serves as the general operator. It seems to me that this corresponds precisely to the satirical route taken by Diderot through Vernet's sites.

Translated from the French by Robin Mackay.

*This text is based on the transcript, in French, of a talk that Jean-François Lyotard gave in spring 1984. The transcript exists in several, slightly different copies which are currently stored in different places in the archives of the Centre Pompidou. Different authors therefore refer to it with different document codes, depending on the copy that they used (No. 94033/666, PCA 1977001/129, Dossier 2009012). The most complete version that we could trace, and that was used as the basis of this first translation into English, can be found at "1994033/666".*





## **PART II: ART**





# From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*

Antony Hudek

Although a number of late twentieth-century exhibitions have already been hailed as “landmark exhibitions”, one major and highly innovative exhibition has eluded the attention of scholars until recently: *Les Immatériaux*, co-curated in 1985 for the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard and the design historian and theorist Thierry Chaput.<sup>1</sup> Among its many novel features was the fact that it was the first exhibition in which a philosopher played a leading role, opening the door to many other instances in which intellectuals would become ad hoc curators.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of the standard sequence of white cubes, Lyotard and Chaput divided the entire fifth floor of the Centre with large sheets of uncoloured metal mesh hanging from the ceiling. Contrary to the neutral lighting of most exhibition environments, *Les Immatériaux* offered a theatrical setting – the work of young

- 1 On the debate surrounding what constitutes a “landmark” in exhibition history, see *Landmark Exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows Since 1968*, a conference held at Tate Modern, London, on 10–11 October, 2008, and Teresa Gleadowe’s review of the conference in *Art Monthly*, no. 321, November 2008, p. 34. On the composition of the curatorial team of *Les Immatériaux* before Lyotard’s arrival, see “La Règle du jeu: Matérialiser *Les Immatériaux*,” in Élie Théofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et après? “Les Immatériaux”* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1985), p. 15 *et passim*; on Thierry Chaput, see the biographical sketch in John Thackara (ed.), *Design After Modernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), p. 232.
- 2 Some of the best known are Bernard Stiegler’s *Mémoires du futur* (Paris: Bibliothèque publique d’information, 1987), Jacques Derrida’s *Mémoires d’aveugle* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1990), Jean Starobinski’s *Largesse* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1994), Julia Kristeva’s *Vision capitales* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 1998), Paul Virilio’s *Ce qui arrive* (Paris: Fondation Cartier, 2002), Bruno Latour’s *Iconoclash* and *Making Things Public* (Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2002, 2005), and Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Le Plaisir au dessin* (Lyon: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 2007).

stage designer Françoise Michel – which played with stark contrasts between spotlight exhibits and areas of near total darkness.<sup>3</sup> In Chaput's words: "Decked in demanding grey, illuminated by improbable lighting, with unpredictable ideas allowed to hover, this hour, this day in this year, suspended, rigorously ordered yet without system, 'The Immaterials' exhibit themselves between seeing, feeling and hearing."<sup>4</sup>

Importantly, *Les Immatériaux* brought together a striking variety of objects, ranging from the latest industrial robots and personal computers to holograms, interactive sound installations, and 3D cinema, along with paintings, photographs and sculptures (the latter ranging from an Ancient Egyptian low-relief to works by Dan Graham, Joseph Kosuth and Giovanni Anselmo). One reason for the heterogeneity of objects represented in *Les Immatériaux* was that many of the exhibits were chosen by Chaput well before Lyotard was invited to join the project in 1983.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI) – the more "sociological" entity devoted to architecture and design within the Centre Pompidou, which initiated *Les Immatériaux* – had been planning an exhibition on new industrial materials since at least 1982.<sup>6</sup>

Various entitled *Création et matériaux nouveaux*, *Matériau et création*, *Matériaux nouveaux et création*, and, in its last form, *La matière dans tous ses états*, this exhibition, first scheduled to take place in 1984, already contained many of the innovative features that found their way into *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>7</sup>

- 3 See the undated and unsigned letter to Françoise Michel in the Centre Georges Pompidou archives, box 94033/227. (Material from the Pompidou archives henceforth cited as PCA followed by the box number.)
- 4 Thierry Chaput, "Entrée en matière", *Petit Journal*, 28 March–15 July 1985, Paris, p. 1. Although *The Immaterials* was the official English translation of *Les Immatériaux*, I use the French phrase throughout in order to avoid translating *matériau* by *material*, which in French could also be translated by *matière*. *Matériau* in fact covers both the English *matter* and *material*. In what follows, all translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- 5 Although the first documented contacts between the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI) and Lyotard took place in May 1983, the contract making official the latter's status as chief curator (*commissaire général*) is dated 29 September 1983. See the letter from Paul Blanquart, then director of the CCI, to Lyotard, dated 28 May 1983 (PCA 1977001/129), and the contract signed by Jean Maheu, President of the Centre Pompidou, dated 27 January 1984 (PCA 94033/668). (François Burkhardt succeeded Blanquart as director of the CCI in July 1984. Both directors appear to have been very supportive of *Les Immatériaux*.)
- 6 An article from *Le Monde* found in the Centre Pompidou archives (in the box labelled "Immatériaux Archi-peinture bas relief") entitled "Les Verres métalliques matériaux d'avenir", dated 29 April 1981, suggests that discussions about the future exhibition began in 1981.
- 7 See "La Matière dans tous ses états (titre provisoire)" (PCA 94033/237). At the first working meeting between members of CCI and Lyotard, the latter argued against "creation" in the title, deeming it a "theological concept". By 10 August 1983, *Les Immatériaux*, followed by "provisional title", appeared on the cover of the first project report authored by Lyotard. In November 1984, Lyotard and Chaput requested that the exhibition title be registered as a trademark.

These features included an emphasis on language as matter; the immateriality of advanced technological materials (from textiles to plastics and holography); exhibits devoted to recent technological developments in food, architecture, music and video; and, crucially, an experimental catalogue produced solely by computer in (almost) real time. The earlier versions of the exhibition also involved many of the future protagonists of *Les Immatériaux*, such as Jean-Louis Boissier (among several other faculty members of Université Paris VIII, where Lyotard was teaching at the time) and Eve Ritscher (a London-based consultant on holography). Furthermore, *Les Immatériaux* benefited from projects pursued concurrently by other groups within the Pompidou, which joined Lyotard's and Chaput's project when it was discovered that their themes overlapped. Thus, an exhibition project on music videos initiated by the Musée National d'Art Moderne was incorporated into *Les Immatériaux*, and another project on electro-acoustic music developed by IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et de Coordination Acoustique/Musique) also seems to have merged with the 1985 exhibition.<sup>8</sup>

Although other institutions expressed interest in taking the show, *Les Immatériaux* was too much a reflection of the unusual museographic practices of the place from which it originated to translate into different contexts, and the show did not tour.<sup>9</sup> For *Les Immatériaux* was much more than an "exhibition", simply understood. It drew upon all the entities within the Centre Pompidou, offering musical performances (including the world premiere of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Kathinkas Gesang*); an impressive film programme (entitled *Ciné-Immatériaux*, curated by Claudine Eizykman and Guy Fihman); a three-day seminar on the relationship between architecture, science and philosophy; as well as three related publications, in addition to the two exhibition catalogues.<sup>10</sup> Indeed *Les Immatériaux* would be among the last exhibitions at the Centre Pompidou to embody the latter's original ambition

8 See the "Projet d'exposition", dated 10 January 1983, and the "Compte-rendu de la réunion du 16 Mai 1983" (PCA 1977001/129 and 94033/236).

9 There were plans to tour parts of *Les Immatériaux* to Austria (Vienna), Brazil (Rio de Janeiro), Japan (Tsukuba), and France (Marseille), though none came to fruition. See documents in PCA 94033/667, 1977001/130, 94033/0234, 1977001/130, respectively.

10 Aside from IRCAM and Musée National d'Art Moderne, *Les Immatériaux* incorporated projects initiated and organized by the BPI (Bibliothèque Publique d'Information), also located in the Centre Pompidou building. A slightly edited version of the film programme that accompanied *Les Immatériaux* is accessible online at <http://www.vasulka.org/archive/ExhONE/CentreGeorgesPomp/CGPcat.pdf>. The three publications are "1984" et les présents de l'univers informationnel (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou/Centre de Création Industrielle, 1985); *Modernes et après: Les Immatériaux* (Paris: Editions Autrement, 1985); and a special issue of *Traverses*, no. 35, September 1985. Another element was to be a video conference via satellite between sites in Tsukuba, Montreal, Milan, Berlin and San Diego (see the document dated 14 June 1984, PCA 94033/0234). This last project was finally abandoned for budgetary reasons. (Letter from Marc Girard to François Burkhardt, dated 20 September 1984 [PCA 1977001/130].)

to be a centre open to all forms of expression, from industrial design and urbanism to painting and performance, instead of a modernist museum based on the neat differentiation between departments according to media.<sup>11</sup> *Les Immatériaux* represented, as it were, a hinge in the Centre Pompidou's history, between a more conventional future (the CCI effectively dissolved a few years later, merging with the Musée National d'Art Moderne) and a certain postmodern idealism that tolerated, even encouraged, the blurring of disciplines and exhibitions with an element of pathos and drama.<sup>12</sup> As Chaput expressed it in 1985, *Les Immatériaux* represented "one of the last 'romantic' experiences".<sup>13</sup>

As the originator of the exhibition, and its main representative within the Centre Pompidou, Chaput played a key role, though he was understandably the less visible of the two co-curators vis-à-vis the public, and especially the media.<sup>14</sup> Bernard Blistène was responsible for the selection of most art works in *Les Immatériaux*; most, but not all: the Egyptian low-relief was Lyotard's personal choice, and we can assume that he was also responsible for the inclusion of Marcel Duchamp, Daniel Buren and Jacques Monory, since he had written extensively on the three artists prior to his involvement in *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>15</sup> As for Lyotard himself, he was instrumental not only in securing certain loans and the participation of prominent figures in the exhibition catalogues, but also in designing the exhibition's overarching linguistic structure. As early as spring 1984 Lyotard had suggested the conflation between five French words deriving from the Indo-European root *mât* (to make by hand, to measure, to build) and the communication model first developed by Harold Lasswell – "Who / Says What / In Which Channel / To Whom / With What Effects?" – later translated into a communication diagram by Claude Shannon and Norbert Wiener, which Roman Jakobson would apply to, and amend in light of, linguistics. Lyotard's conflation of these communication models with

11 *Beaubourg: Les Dix Premières Années du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977–1987* (Paris: Beaux-arts magazine, 1987), p.10.

12 "*Les Immatériaux* ... is a kind of dramaturgy of the era being born." (Press release recorded on an audio cassette and distributed on 8 January 1985.) For an overview of the history of the CCI, see François Barré and Bernadette Dufrêne, "*Le CCI, du Musée des Arts Décoratifs à Beaubourg*", *Centre Pompidou, 30 ans d'histoire* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2007), p. 86–91.

13 "*La Règle du jeu: Matérialiser Les Immatériaux*. Entretien avec l'équipe du C.C.I.", *Modernes et après*, p. 20.

14 Lyotard credits Chaput with the idea of the metallic mesh. See p. 10 of the undated "Conférence de Jean-François Lyotard" (PCA 1977001/130). In a letter dated January 1985 to Dominique Bozo, then director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Lyotard defends Chaput's contribution to *Les Immatériaux* as "at least" on par with his own.

15 On Blistène's role, see the letter from Jean-François Lyotard to Pierre Gaudibert, dated 3 September 1984 (PCA 94033/669).

the etymological group of *mat-* terms was hardly rigorous.<sup>16</sup> What it proposed was an epistemological short-circuit between heterogeneous discourses – the one poetic, the other scientific – to establish the following equivalences: *matériau* = *support* (medium), *matériel* = *destinataire* (to whom the message is addressed), *maternité* = *destinateur* (the message's emitter), *matière* = *réfèrent* (the referent), and *matrice* = *code* (the code) [Figure 1].

The drawings collected in the *Album* section of the exhibition catalogue indicate that the layout of *Les Immatériaux* had reached a near-definitive stage by September 1984. Once past the initial corridor, the visitor would have to choose between one of five strands (or “valences”) leading through the exhibition, each corresponding to one of the five *mat-* strands. Each *mat-* strand would in turn incorporate a number of “zones”, with each zone unified by a common soundtrack, audible through headphones distributed to each visitor before entering the exhibition.<sup>17</sup> (The soundtrack, selected by Lyotard's then collaborator and future partner Dolorès Rogozinski, and engineered by the Pompidou technician Gérard Chiron, consisted of excerpts of literary and philosophical texts by the likes of Maurice Blanchot and Samuel Beckett.)

Each zone subdivided into several “sites”: that is, variously sized installations with more or less obvious reference to the *mat-* strand in which they were included. For example, the *Nu vain* site designed by Martine Moinot – an active figure in Lyotard's support team at the Centre Pompidou – featured “twelve asexual mannequins” with, at the back, “a screening of a passage from Joseph Losey's film *Monsieur Klein* alternating with a photo from a concentration camp prisoner”.<sup>18</sup> As the visitor entered this site – one of three in the first zone of the “*matériau*” strand – she or he would have heard the voice of the poet and playwright Antonin Artaud (*Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*, originally intended as a radio broadcast in 1948) and Rogozinski (*The Angel*). Thus guided – or, more accurately, misguided – through the exhibition's obscurity by the soundtrack, the isolated visitor of *Les Immatériaux* would drift from site to

16 At no point did Lyotard go beyond quoting “Laswell, Wiener, then Jakobson” when discussing the communication models informing *Les Immatériaux*. Not only does he not provide any bibliographic references, he consistently misspells “Lasswell” with one “s”. Moreover, Lyotard admitted in an interview that the common “*mât*” root was essentially fictional. (See Bernard Blistène, “A Conversation with Jean- François Lyotard” in Giancarlo Politi and Helena Kontova (eds), *Flash Art: Two Decades of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), p. 31.

17 Nathalie Heinich and Antonia Wunderlich cite 31 zones, the number indicated in *Petit Journal*. See, respectively, “Un Évènement culturel,” in Christian Carrier (ed.), *Les Immatériaux (au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985): Étude de l'évènement exposition et de son public* (Paris: Expo-Média, 1986), p.78, and Antonia Wunderlich: *Der Philosoph im Museum: Die Ausstellung Les Immatériaux von Jean-François Lyotard* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), p.36. The English brochure of the exhibition entitled *Route: Zones & Sites* describes 26 zones, which is the number quoted by Francesca Gallo in *Les Immatériaux: Un Percorso di Jean-François Lyotard nell'arte contemporanea* (Rome: Aracne, 2008), p. 62.

18 *Petit Journal*, p. 4.

site and strand to strand with, as only markers, the switch between voices, indicating the passage from one zone to another.

If no two trajectories through *Les Immatériaux* could possibly be alike – given the freedom the visitor had to choose her own sequence of sites and zones – Lyotard and Chaput were careful to document the visitors' drifting patterns, devising a dense network of self-indexing nodes both inside and outside of the exhibition. Each visitor to *Les Immatériaux* was to receive a magnetic card with which to record the sites she went through: upon leaving the exhibition, she should have been able to print a hard-copy record of the visit, though this system of "mise en carte" does not seem to have been implemented.<sup>19</sup> Another self-indexing node in *Les Immatériaux – Les Variables Cachées* in zone 12 ("matrice" strand) – allowed visitors, by way of a computer terminal, to provide answers to a set of questions, which contributed to statistical views of the exhibition's demographics projected on a screen in the same site.<sup>20</sup> Published in 1986, the exhaustive study of *Les Immatériaux* by the sociologist Nathalie Heinich constituted another means of measuring and archiving the visitors' movements through, and reactions to, the exhibition.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of constituting an archive of the communication generated by *Les Immatériaux*, mediated analogically as well as digitally, also determined the exhibition's catalogues. Instead of the traditional single volume acting as an anticipated record of the completed event, two publications were issued, both of which reflected the processes underpinning *Les Immatériaux*. The first is a folder with, on one side, "L'Inventaire" – a sheaf of loose pages each describing one of the exhibition's 61 sites – and, on the other, a bound "Album" of notes and sketches (most of these by Philippe Délis, the scenographer of *Les Immatériaux*) documenting the exhibition's development from *La matière dans tous ses états* in 1984 to a snapshot of the installation, presumably taken in early 1985. The second publication, entitled *Epreuves d'écriture*, is a softcover-bound volume containing the records of a computer-mediated discussion among 26 participants – including Daniel Buren, Michel Butor, Jacques Derrida and Isabelle Stengers – of a set of 50 terms proposed by Lyotard.<sup>22</sup> Lyotard held this second volume in high esteem: "It is probably a 'book' that elicits a

19 Although it features in *Album* (Paris, 1985, p. 27), and was announced in the documentation for the press conference on 8 January 1985 (PCA, box "1985 Expo 'Les Immatériaux'").

20 See the document "Les Variables Cachées: 55 Réponses pour la période du 22.02.85 au 28.02.85" (PCA 94033/229).

21 See Nathalie Heinich, "Enquête sur 'Les Immatériaux': projet 15 mai 1985" (PCA 1977001/130) and the published results in "Un évènement culturel," p. 25–124.

22 For *Epreuves d'écriture*, each "author" (the quotation marks are Lyotard's) was given an Olivetti M20, connected to a central Olivetti M24 based at the Centre Pompidou, which logged the participants' contributions between September and December 1984. (See Lyotard and Chaput, "La Raison des épreuves", *Epreuves d'écriture*, Paris, 1985, p. 6–7.) The technology that enabled the catalogues' production was developed by SERPEA

kind of beauty, as it were, very different from what I was accustomed to. For me it is a great book."<sup>23</sup>

## The Postmodern

With its self-reflexivity and auto-archiving impulse, *Les Immatériaux* could be considered a self-remembering exhibition – to paraphrase exhibition historian Reesa Greenberg – on the condition that we recognise this remembering as paradoxical and essentially Duchampian.<sup>24</sup> For, to refer once again to the metaphor of the hinge, *Les Immatériaux* seemed to pivot undecidedly between a “sensitivity” looking backwards, so to speak, to an origin that never was – embodied by the Egyptian low-relief sculpture and the pseudo-etymology of the exhibition’s title – and another looking beyond, to a technoscientific future always almost-here, that is, to a postmodernism always in need of experimentation and hence infinitely deferred. In his writings on the postmodern, Lyotard would often qualify this wavering as an “anamnesis”, a psychoanalytic working-through (*durcharbeiten*) in the future anterior, “in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done”.<sup>25</sup> What Duchamp scholar Thierry de Duve writes of the feeling elicited by the appearance of Duchamp’s readymade could well apply to *Les Immatériaux*: “the paradoxical sense of the future that a deliberately retrospective gaze opens up.”<sup>26</sup>

In fact, Lyotard was explicit in placing *Les Immatériaux* under the sign of Duchamp. A site in zone 6 (in the “*matériau*” or “medium” strand) was named *Infra-mince*, and featured various handwritten notes and sketches by Duchamp related to the latter’s notion of “infra-thin”, as well as an excerpt of Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* on the soundtrack. In zone 20 (“*matière*” or “referent” strand), a site entitled *Odeur Peinte* included two works by Duchamp, the 1959 *Torture-Morte* and *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette* from 1921, accompanied by a reading of a text by cultural theorist and curator Paul Virilio. Duchamp, in other words, could be said to play the role of yet another dubious postmodern “origin”, after the *mât* etymology and the Egyptian sculpture, both for the Centre Pompidou and for Lyotard. Indeed, Lyotard’s first contact

(Société d’édition et de réalisation de presse écrite, audiovisuelle et télématique), a private company directed by Alain Rey.

23 “Conférence de Jean-François Lyotard” (PCA 1977001/130), p. 19.

24 See Reesa Greenberg, “Remembering Exhibitions: From Point to Line to Web” in *Tate Papers* 12 (2009): <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/7264>.

25 Jean-François Lyotard, “Réponse à la question: Qu’est-ce que le postmoderne?,” in *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 31.

26 Thierry de Duve, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1996), p. 86. De Duve acknowledges Lyotard’s writings in the same book (p. 40, n. 15), while Lyotard refers to de Duve’s writings on Duchamp in “Réponse à la question: Qu’est-ce que le postmoderne?,” p. 20.



with the Pompidou took place in 1977, when he contributed to the catalogue of its inaugural exhibition, devoted to Duchamp.<sup>27</sup>

It is perhaps a symptom of both the transformation of the postmodern from a term of historical classification into a more allegorical principle, and of an increasing awareness of the value of exhibitions as performative sites for historical reflection, that *Les Immatériaux* is now, after more than two decades, entering philosophical and art-historical discourses. However, the main reason for the long-standing exclusion of *Les Immatériaux* from these discourses was undoubtedly Lyotard's own reticence to discuss his 1985 curatorial project. Shortly after his collaboration with the Pompidou came to an end, Lyotard wrote of "looking forward to not having to think about (to suffer from)" *Les Immatériaux* again. He went on to describe his curatorial experience as having prompted an "anamnesis", and the exhibition itself as having "mastered us much more than we mastered it".<sup>28</sup>

Why would Lyotard have judged his work on the exhibition in such traumatic terms as "suffering" and "mastery"? The fact that the public and critical response to *Les Immatériaux* was mostly negative may have been a factor.<sup>29</sup> "Decked in demanding grey", the exhibition was unlikely to have ever enjoyed widespread popular appeal, but the "feeling of a period coming to an end and the worried curiosity that awakens at the dawn of postmodernity" – emotions that the curators sought to evoke – was no doubt accentuated, albeit unintentionally, by the numerous technical failures that plagued *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>30</sup> The headsets – a prototype then being tested by Philips – were particularly prone to breaking down, forcing the exhibition at one point to stay open only part-time [Figure 3].<sup>31</sup>

The headsets were required, not optional, and came at a fee, which provoked the ire of those wanting to see the exhibition without its soundtrack.<sup>32</sup> One

27 See Lyotard, "Etant Donnés: inventaire du dernier nu", in Jean Clair (ed.), *Abécédaire: Approches critiques, L'Œuvre de Marcel Duchamp*, vol. 3 (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1977). As Rajchman wrote in an early, unpaginated draft of his article "The Postmodern Museum" (now in the Centre Pompidou archives), *Les Immatériaux* "may be the first Duchampian museum." (Cf. "The Postmodern Museum," *Art in America*, vol. 73, no. 10, October 1985, p. 110–117.)

28 Jean-François Lyotard, "D'un travail", *Les Immatériaux (Au Centre Georges Pompidou en 1985): Étude de l'événement exposition et de son public*, p. 147–148.

29 *Les Immatériaux* does not seem to have attracted unusually large numbers of visitors, despite its budget – the largest at the time for an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou. See "Bilan simplifié de la manifestation *Les Immatériaux*" and "Le point sur *Les Immatériaux*" (respectively PCA 1977001/130 and 94033/667).

30 See the letter from the head of security of the Centre Pompidou, dated 28 March 1985, who complains of the low visibility in the exhibition, making it difficult for visitors to find the exit and the toilets (PCA 1977001/130).

31 Undated fax from Chaput to Havre Marine Systèmes (PCA 94033/227).

32 Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein wrongly claim that the headsets were "recommended". See their "Thinking Philosophy, Spatially: Jean-François Lyotard's *Les*



[Figure 3] Exhibition visitor, site *Arôme simulé* (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, photograph by Jean-Claude Planchet).

letter addressed by a visitor to the Pompidou complained that the exhibition discriminated against the hearing-impaired.<sup>33</sup> Another particularly scathing critique, penned by Michel Cournot in *Le Monde*, took the exhibition to task for assaulting the visitor with incomprehensible stimuli, from the magazine handed out before entering – impossible to read in the darkened exhibition space – to the unidentified voices streaming through the headsets.<sup>34</sup>

Lyotard's rebuke to Cournot's criticism, which also appeared in *Le Monde*, defended the exhibition's technological let-downs, arguing that such is the price to pay for experimentation: "Mr Cournot wanted to revel in the jubilation offered by the new mastery promised by the 'technologists', by the prophets of a 'postmodern' break? The exhibition denies it, and this is precisely its gambit – to not offer any reassurance, especially and above all by prophesying a new dawn. To make us look at what is 'déjà vu', as Duchamp did with the readymades, and to make us unlearn what is 'familiar' to us: these are instead the exhibition's concerns." Lyotard went on to write: "The idea of progress bequeathed by, among others, the Enlightenment, has faltered, and with it a

*Immatériaux* and the Philosophy of the Exhibition", in *Thinking Worlds: The Moscow Conference on Philosophy, Politics, and Art*, Joseph Backstein, Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein (eds.) (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008), p. 142. To gauge the violence of the visitors' response to *Les Immatériaux*, see the exhibition's comment book (PCA 1977001/130).

33 Letter from Marina Devillers, dated 29 April 1985 (PCA 1977001/130).

34 Michel Cournot, "Un 'Magasin de curiosités', naïf et macabre", *Le Monde*, 12 April 1985, p. 21.

triumphant humanism. Greatness of thought – Adorno’s for example (must I spell his name out?) – is to endure the fright derived from such a withdrawal of meaning, to bear witness to it, to attempt its anamnesis.”<sup>35</sup>

Beyond its negative reception, I suggest that *Les Immatériaux* proved a particularly difficult experience for Lyotard because it represented a failed attempt at recasting “the postmodern”, an expression his book *La Condition postmoderne*, first published in 1979, helped transform into one of the more widely circulated theoretical catchphrases of 1980s. When asked why he was invited to become chief curator of *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard consistently professed to have no clue.<sup>36</sup> Yet this slim 1979 volume, whose influence extended to both sides of the Atlantic, must have played a major role in Lyotard’s decision to lead an exhibition project devoted to “new materials”.

Of course, as Lyotard was the first to acknowledge, the problem was that *La Condition postmoderne* could not assume the responsibility of having the final say on “postmodernism”, given the context of its writing – a commission by the state of Quebec for “a report on knowledge”.<sup>37</sup> As Lyotard scholar Niels Brügger has remarked, if the renown of *La Condition postmoderne* weighed so heavily on the philosopher’s subsequent writing, it was because the book itself is ambivalent, describing the postmodern at once as modal and epochal – that is, as a narrative framework in which certain functions come to the fore (such as performativity and paralogy in language games), and as a historical moment marking the decline of legitimating narratives (for example, of emancipation and enlightenment).<sup>38</sup>

After noting the absence of the postmodern in *Le Différend* – the book published in 1983 which Lyotard was finishing when he embarked on *Les Immatériaux* – Brügger writes that the “postmodern continued to haunt Lyotard’s work”.<sup>39</sup> Brügger refers to an essay entitled “Note sur les sens de

35 Jean-François Lyotard, “Qui a peur des ‘Immatériaux?’”, p. 3, and 5 (PCA 94033/233). The article appeared in *Le Monde*, 3 May 1985.

36 “Conférence de Jean-François Lyotard”, p. 1, and “Jean-François Lyotard discusses the exhibition, the Immaterials, with Judy Annear and Robert Owen, Paris 28 March 1985”, p. 6 (PCA 94033/667).

37 Lyotard is forthright about the book’s modest pretensions, stating in its Introduction that “the text that follows is a product of circumstances”. Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Minuit, 1979), p. 9.

38 Niels Brügger, “What about the Postmodern? The Concept of the Postmodern in the Work of Lyotard”, *Yale French Studies*, no. 99, 2001, p. 80–82.

39 Brügger, “What about the Postmodern?”, p. 90. Brügger also acknowledges – unconvincingly, to my mind – the presence of the postmodern in *Le Différend* insofar as the postmodern is “claimed to be inscribed in the epochal context already referred to as postmodern in *The Postmodern Condition*” (p. 89). Regarding Lyotard’s calendar overlap between *Le Différend* and *Les Immatériaux*, it is worth noting that the entire schedule of exhibitions for the fifth floor of the Centre Pompidou was reordered to suit his commitment to finishing the book. See Blanquart’s “Note à Monsieur Maheu”, dated 7 June 1983 (PCA 94033/669).

'post-', in which Lyotard states that "understood in this way, the 'post-' of 'postmodern' does not mean a movement of *comeback*, of *flashback*, of *feedback*, that is, of repetition, but an 'ana-' process, an analytical process, a process of anamnesis, of anagogy and anamorphosis, which works through [*élabore*] an 'initial forgetting'." In this essay, Lyotard cites painting as a prime example of postmodern anamnesis:

I mean that to properly understand the work of modern painters, say from Manet to Duchamp or Barnett Newman, one should compare their work to an anamnesis in the analytic sense. Just as the analysand tries to work through [*élaborer*] her or his current problem by freely associating apparently inconsistent elements with past situations, allowing her or him to uncover hidden meanings in her/his life and behaviour, so we can understand the work of Cézanne, Picasso, Delaunay, Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Malevich and finally Duchamp as a "perlaboration" (*durcharbeiten*) undertaken by modernity on its own meaning.<sup>40</sup>

*Les Immatériaux* offered Lyotard the opportunity to work through the haunting of *La Condition postmoderne*, the former providing him with a stage upon which to perform the transition from an epochal or modal postmodern into an allegorical or anamnestic one. Whereas *La Condition postmoderne* was subtitled "Report on Knowledge", one of the subtitles suggested by Lyotard for *Les Immatériaux* was "*L'Esprit du temps*", which, to use the more common German expression, translates as *Zeitgeist*.<sup>41</sup> By suggesting this subtitle, Lyotard would have been making a clear attempt to reclaim the postmodern from the version of the term made fashionable by such exhibitions as the 1982 *Zeitgeist*, which sought to include the latest expressionist forms of painting in a twentieth-century avant-garde tradition.<sup>42</sup> In a 1985 interview with Blistène, Lyotard accuses the supporters of a "return to painting" of forgetting "everything that people have been trying to do for over a century: they've lost all sense of what's fundamentally at stake in painting. There's a vague return to a concern with the enjoyment experienced by the viewer, they've abandoned the task of the artist as it might have been perceived by a Cézanne, a Duchamp."<sup>43</sup>

Lyotard's own version of a postmodern *Zeitgeist* at the Centre Pompidou was an affective hovering between the "post" he had imprudently prognosticated

40 Lyotard, "Note sur les sens de 'post-', *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, p. 119.

41 In the end *Les Immatériaux* did not retain a subtitle. On the various attempts at finding one, see page 2 of a document drafted by L'Agence Béliet, the marketing agency hired to publicise the exhibition (PCA 1977001/130), and the unsigned and undated document in the same box which lists another subtitle proposed by Lyotard: "Entre essor et déclin, nos savoirs, nos pratiques, nos sensibilités" ("Between expansion and decline, our skills, our customs, our sensibilities").

42 *Zeitgeist* was curated by Christos Joachimides and Norman Rosenthal at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin.

43 Blistène, "A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard", p. 131.

in 1979 and a lost modernism that could never again be brought back to life. This paradoxical temporal stasis would provide the clearest sign, not of the decline of the twentieth-century avant-garde as such, but of the end of the possibility of recuperating it to justify an increasingly complex and progressively dehumanised technoscientific environment. For Lyotard, the historical break in the telling of twentieth-century history is marked – as it was for many before him, particularly Adorno – by the mass murder of the Jews during the Second World War:

Following Theodor Adorno, I have used the term “Auschwitz” to indicate the extent to which the stuff [*matière*] of recent Western history appears inconsistent in light of the “modern” project of emancipating humanity. What kind of reflection is capable of “lifting”, in the sense of *aufheben*, “Auschwitz”, by placing it in a general, empirical and even speculative process directed towards universal emancipation? There is a kind of sorrow [*chagrin*] in the *Zeitgeist*, which can express itself through reactive, even reactionary attitudes, or through utopias, but not through an orientation that would positively open a new perspective.<sup>44</sup>

## Anamnesis

It is striking to note the extent to which this element of “chagrin” – “sorrow” in English – particularly in its relation to “Auschwitz”, is overlooked in the (still scant) literature on *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>45</sup> This is all the more remarkable given that the word carries – in France at least – inescapable connotations of stalled remembrance of World War Two, after Marcel Ophüls’s well-known documentary from 1969 *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (*The Sorrow and the Pity*), a film that gives equal time to testimonies by former French resisters and collaborators.

*Le Différend* – which, as I mentioned, Lyotard was completing when he was approached by the CCI to curate the exhibition – opens with the prediction that in the next century “there will no longer be any books”, since there will be no time to read and the aim of all communication will be to absorb “messages” as efficiently as possible. Thus, like all books published at the end of the twentieth century, *Le Différend* stands at the end of the line (“appartient ... à une fin de série”).<sup>46</sup> To oppose, or at least defer this dystopian outcome, Lyotard theorises “the differend”, the irresolvable difference between heterogeneous regimes of phrases. “The differend” never allows one to conclude, as it takes the interrogative form of *Arrive-t-il?* (“Will it occur?” or “Is it coming?”), a temporal indecision Lyotard extends to “Auschwitz”, an event he takes not only

44 Lyotard, “Note sur le sens de ‘post’”, *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, p. 116–117.

45 Particularly as Auschwitz was brought up by Lyotard at the very first project meeting for *Les Immatériaux*, on 23 June 1983, as an example of an historical “event” – see the unsigned handwritten minutes (PCA 94033/232).

46 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Minuit 1983), p. 13–14.

as a historical break (as Adorno did, according to Lyotard), but as a linguistic one (hence the use of quotation marks).<sup>47</sup>

As an exhibition rather than a book, and as a dramaturgy beginning with images referencing the Shoah (through Losey's "fictional" cinematic account), *Les Immatériaux* staged an experience of "sorrow" meant to give rise to a profoundly negative feeling – a feeling the visitor could not possibly have escaped as she wandered through the dark maze of the Centre Pompidou, confronted by the endless choices to determine a trajectory without any identifiable goal in sight. As Lyotard put it, "The exhibition will have to take into consideration this aspect of sorrow [*chagrin*] and this form of 'continuation' [*poursuite*] of technoscientific development, this extraordinary responsibility of a hundred years of contemporary or avant-garde art where all the big questions were posed ... There needs to be this aspect of sorrow and this aspect of jubilation through productive questioning."<sup>48</sup>

In *Les Immatériaux* this jubilation never arrives – as Lyotard reminded Cournot in their heated exchange in *Le Monde*. Contaminated by doubt instilled from the "pessimistic" beginning of the exhibition, the visitor to *Les Immatériaux* could never be certain that what should occur had, in fact, occurred, whether jubilatory or not. "When you are near the end of the exhibition maybe there is a sort of optimism, but my idea and that of the organising team was not to be optimistic or pessimistic: the exhibition is neutral ground", Lyotard commented.<sup>49</sup> Note the "maybe", for it suggests a fundamental hesitation, a circularity and endlessness that can be termed "neutral", but that can just as easily be understood as Lyotard's indecision that after "Auschwitz" – that is, after coming to terms with the technosciences not as the enemy of art (as per the Frankfurt School) but as complicit in an increasing complexification of interaction at every level of human life – something might, indeed, occur.<sup>50</sup>

As the visitor entered *Les Immatériaux*, she encountered the Ancient Egyptian low-relief, depicting a goddess offering the sign of life to the kind Nectanebo II. Looking at this sculpture in the exhibition's antechamber – "irreplaceable witness for us of what 'we' are in the process of finally losing", wrote Lyotard – the visitor would have heard, through the headset, the sound of human breathing.<sup>51</sup> The visitor then proceeded through a long dark corridor, at the

47 "The 'Auschwitz' model would designate an 'experience' of language that puts a halt to speculative discourse" (*Le Différend*, p. 132–133.). On the troubling implications of quotation marks around "Auschwitz", see Elisabeth de Fontenay, *Une Toute autre histoire: Questions à Jean-François Lyotard* (Paris: Fayard, 2006), p. 81 *et passim*.

48 "Conférence de Jean-François Lyotard", p. 9.

49 "Jean-François Lyotard discusses the exhibition," p. 3.

50 On Lyotard and the Frankfurt School, see "Gespräch mit Jean-François Lyotard von Marie Luise Syring und Clemens Härle," p. 3 (PCA 94033/667).

51 For Lyotard's description of the Egyptian sculpture, see his letter to Gaudibert quoted above.

end of which stood a large-scale mirror, which in turn led to a circular open-plan space entitled *Théâtre du non-corps*, where she faced five boxes, one per *mat*-strand coursing through the exhibition. Each box contained a miniature theatre set inspired by Beckett's plays, designed by Beckett's stage designer Jean-Claude Fall and by Gérard Didier. Antonia Wunderlich, in her important monograph on *Les Immatériaux*, has convincingly argued that the sequence formed by the Egyptian low-relief, the dark corridor, the mirror and the circular amphitheatre-like space with the five miniature theatre sets would have suggested to the visitor that the origin of the exhibition lay in the disembodied, objective and self-reflexive gaze of modernity.<sup>52</sup> For Lyotard, it is this gaze that allowed the goddess's sign of life to be measured "like cattle" by the Nazi doctor pictured in the fragment of Losey's film projected in the *Nu Vain* site, and that the entire exhibition attempted to re-stage in the light – a threatening, uncertain light – of technoscientific postmodernity.<sup>53</sup> At the other end of *Les Immatériaux*, the visitor once again encountered the same Egyptian low-relief, this time presented as an image cut up into vertical strips projected onto a screen, as if to intimate that the mythical image would have to be thoroughly transformed, spliced and reassembled before "we" could begin to re-imagine another founding gesture, another community.

It is tempting to assimilate this final blurred projection of a supposed common cultural heritage to a sublimation of modernity into postmodernity, or to a form of transcendence. Lyotard has stated that the sublime was very much on his mind while working on *Les Immatériaux*, particularly as he was lecturing on "the question of the sublime" at the Université Paris VIII and publishing widely on the subject at the time.<sup>54</sup> But while he was preoccupied by the sublime, and would remain so long after *Les Immatériaux*, his declared area of research in 1984 was "Philosophy and the new media [*les nouveaux supports*] – postmodernity."<sup>55</sup> One could argue that Lyotard sought with *Les Immatériaux* to disassociate the postmodern from the sublime, if only by excluding those artworks he had previously qualified as sublime, such as Barnett Newman's paintings, and by making multiple references to Duchamp, whose aesthetic, Lyotard pointed out, "has nothing to do with the sublime".<sup>56</sup> Rather than simply produce an aesthetic experience illustrative of a sublime or technoscientific future, the blur performed by *Les Immatériaux* might then allude to the space of Masaccio's frescoes and Cézanne's late paintings of the Sainte-Victoire

52 Wunderlich, *Der Philosoph im Museum*, p. 107 *et passim*.

53 Lyotard, "Qui a peur des 'Immatériaux'?", p. 5.

54 See "Gespräch mit Jean-François Lyotard", p. 4.

55 "Fiche de renseignements à produire à l'appui d'une demande d'autorisation de cumul de fonctions", filled in by Lyotard, dated 5 January 1984, in the Centre Pompidou archives.

56 Blistène, "A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard", p. 129. For Lyotard's reflections on Newman's sublime, see in particular "L'Instant Newman" in *L'Inhumain: Causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1988), p. 89–99.

mountain, in which Lyotard recognised the deconstruction of representation in order to intimate a sense of the inevitable decline that accompanies the exhaustion of modernity's claim to pure, total and objective reason. As Lyotard wrote already in 1971, "This space [of Cézanne's late paintings] is not at all representational any more. Instead, it embodies the deconstruction of the focal zone by the curved area in the periphery of the field of vision. It no longer makes an over there visible according to geometrical optics, but manifests Mount Sainte-Victoire in the process, as it were, of making itself visible."<sup>57</sup>

In short, the space embodied at *Les Immatériaux* is a dynamic one, itself based on a pictorial one, a temporal experiment that makes manifest, at one remove, the spatial experiment of the painter making manifest the object of her gaze in the process of becoming visible. In the documents Lyotard and Chaput prepared for the press, they defined *Les Immatériaux* not as an exhibition but as a "*mise en espace-temps*", a "non-exhibition", a "manifestation". By foregrounding this last expression, the two curators sought to "question the traditional presentation of exhibitions, which are indebted to the salons of the eighteenth century and to galleries".<sup>58</sup>

## "Painting"

For Lyotard, one of the most successful "postmodern" efforts to translate the spatial experience of the exhibition into the temporal experience of a manifestation was the philosopher and critic Denis Diderot's reports on the Paris Salons of the 1760s, which relied on narrative devices that played upon – or deconstructed to endlessly reconstruct – painting's power to elicit the sublime. In Diderot's report on the Salon of 1767, from which Lyotard quotes in the preparatory documents for *Les Immatériaux*, the eighteenth-century critic imagines himself wandering through a landscape modelled after a painting by Joseph Vernet, in the company of a fictitious character (a priest) who claims that painting could never possibly reproduce the sublime beauty of the landscape – which is, of course, based precisely on a Vernet painting. In this intermingling of art and life, of realism and fiction, Lyotard sees Diderot performing "a kind of rotation" whereby the author "settles in a fictitious space represented by painting and from there defies all possible painting".<sup>59</sup> This is how the sublime could be said to re-enter *Les Immatériaux*, by way of a derivation

57 Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (trans.) (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010 [1971]), p. 197.

58 See the unpaginated press release for *Les Immatériaux* distributed before the press conference on 8 January 1985 (PCA, box entitled "1985 expo 'Les Immatériaux'"), and the second project description for *Les Immatériaux* dated April 1984 (PCA 1977001/130).

59 Jean-François Lyotard, unpublished document entitled "Après six mois de travail", in this volume, p. 52 (PCA 1977001/129).



from the illustration of the sublime (in the works of Newman, for example) to a non-representational, second-degree sublime that comes to the fore in the act of manifesting, or trying to manifest the sublime at work in painting.<sup>60</sup>

As opposed to the Enlightenment *Bildungsroman* and the modern city through which the Baudelairian *flâneur* or Situationist chronicler recorded his first-person impressions, *Les Immatériaux* refused to grant primacy to the subject's all-powerful subjective eye. Had it aspired to showcase the sublime, *Les Immatériaux* would have taken the form of the "blockbuster" display (among which, for example, one could cite Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project* at Tate Modern, London, in 2003). Instead, Lyotard's and Chaput's "manifestation" was to the "large-scale retrospective what Joyce's *Ulysses* is to the *Odyssey*", that is, a narrative attempt to make the process of exhibiting manifest.<sup>61</sup> Between *Ulysses* and the *Odyssey*, the relation to a putative origin changes, as does the flow of the narrative: chronological and sequential in the latter, heterogeneous and non-linear in the former. In describing the effect sought by *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard frequently invoked Virilio's notion of *surexposition* ("overexposure" or, equally, "overexhibition"), by which was meant the transformation of cities into sprawling "conurbations" where "the opacity of construction materials is reduced to nothing" and the architecture "begins to drift, to float in an electronic ether devoid of spatial limits yet inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous broadcast".<sup>62</sup> What distinguishes this sublime cyber-landscape from Lyotard's and Chaput's stagecraft is precisely the exhibition's opacity and depth – its "difficult" greyness and theatrical obscurity – which impeded the seamless mobility and translucency of Virilio's futuristic vision.<sup>63</sup>

The fact that the setting for this alternate vision of postmodernism was a "manifestation" is crucial, for it is through an exhibition conceived as an immersive theatrical environment that the singularity of the modernist eye could be transcended and, at the same time, that transcendence in general, in the sense of *Aufhebung*, could be shown to be thoroughly unpredictable, literally unforeseeable.<sup>64</sup> And it is precisely this quality that undermines the efforts of those seeking to discuss *Les Immatériaux* as a novel treatment of the "exhibition medium". Lyotard aimed to challenge Shannon and Wiener's

60 This transition between the two sublimes is discussed by Willem van Reijen and Dick Veerman in their conversation with Lyotard, "Les Lumières, le sublime", in *Les Cahiers de philosophie*, no. 5, 1988, p. 78.

61 Early project description of *Les Immatériaux*, p. 4 (PCA 92053/032).

62 Paul Virilio, "Une Ville surexposée", *Change International*, no. 1, 1983, p. 20 (PCA 94033/0234).

63 See the early project description of *Les Immatériaux*, p. 11–12. Lyotard contrasts *Les Immatériaux* with Virilio's *surexposition* in "Compte-rendu de la réunion du 19 décembre 1983" (PCA 94033/668).

64 Lyotard discusses "manifestation" in relation to Hegel's *Aufhebung* in *Discours, figure*, p. 50–51.

communication diagram, in which “medium” – one possible translation of the French “support” – is the central term.<sup>65</sup> Following Diderot’s allegorical fable, *Les Immatériaux* does not perform a “deconstruction” of an exhibition medium, but rather draws attention to a specific “medium” condition – that of painting – through the specific “exhibitionary” form of a heterogeneous “mise en espace-temps”, in which competing discursive genres could be played out.<sup>66</sup>

As I have mentioned, it is likely that the inclusion in *Les Immatériaux* of Duchamp, Monory and Buren can be attributed directly to Lyotard. By 1985 Lyotard had published essays on all three, and having noted the conspicuous absence at the Pompidou of “painterly” painters such as Newman – on which Lyotard had also written – one can infer that what the three artists have in common, in relation to *Les Immatériaux*, is their complex relationship to the “medium” of painting and its manifestation. In particular, including these “painters” would have allowed Lyotard to counter the Adornian thesis that the technosciences had rendered the efforts of modernist avant-gardes obsolete, and to present three case studies in which “painting” defied the repeatedly declared “end” of its medium condition. This is not to argue that the covert presence of “painting” in *Les Immatériaux* constituted proof that postmodern heterogeneity effectively challenged the divisions modernism had upheld between art, science and popular culture. Rather, the incidental presence of “painting” in *Les Immatériaux* articulated one way in which the most modernist medium could relinquish its material limits in order to manifest the processes by which it makes seeing visible. How successful one judged this demonstration to be would ultimately determine whether one found *Les Immatériaux* to be a dramatisation of the sorrow prompted by the spectacle of the decline of Enlightenment ideals or of the uncertain jubilation elicited by the unfulfillable promise of the postmodern.

In contrast to Duchamp, Monory appeared in only one site, with a large four-panel painting from 1973 entitled *Explosion*.<sup>67</sup> On each of the panels was the same “hyper-realist” depiction of a commercial aeroplane exploding, the image progressively fading from left to right as the image went from a vivid blue-on-white in the first panel, to an almost white monochrome in the last. In the first panel on the left, the artist copied the image from a photograph; in the second, only the lower left-hand corner of the painting was painted “free hand”, while the rest of the canvas was covered with light-sensitive emulsion

65 Gallo, Wunderlich and Birnbaum/Wallenstein all use the expression “exhibition medium” in reference to *Les Immatériaux* (see, respectively, *Les Immatériaux*, p. 34, *Der Philosoph*, p. 14 *et passim*, and “Thinking Philosophy”, p. 143–144).

66 For the expression “mise en espace-temps”, see the second published report on *Les Immatériaux* (PCA 1977001/130).

67 Monory’s *Explosion* occupied the *Peintre sans corps* site in zone 9 of the “matériau” strand. The soundtrack for this zone featured excerpts from texts by Maurice Blanchot, Octavio Paz and Henri Michaux.

on which a slide of the same image was projected to produce a photographic impression; the third and fourth canvases were entirely “photographic”, with no trace of the artist’s hand. On the card in the exhibition catalogue corresponding to the site of Monory’s *Explosion*, Lyotard adds a cryptic note: “The painter confronts the two ways. Catastrophe of painting?” As Lyotard specified on the back of the card – an excerpt from his book on Monory published a year before *Les Immatériaux* – these two “ways” are not to be understood as “Cézanne contra Niépce”, that is, as different mediums, but rather as two different times between which the painter oscillates: the time of capitalism (measurable, accountable, predictable) and libidinal time (gratuitous, excessive, incapable of foresight or memory).<sup>68</sup>

Thus, it is not painting in the era of generalised technoscience that suffers the catastrophe of its own demise. Rather it is painting that provokes a chronological catastrophe by cloaking itself in the dandy’s melancholic blue-grey, and by stalling capitalism’s unshakeable positivism. As it was displayed in *Les Immatériaux*, Monory’s painterly disappearing act functioned as a museographic relic, a tangible trace of two contradictory impulses: on the one hand, the increasing discrepancy between the slowness of the painter’s hand and the immediate act of recording mass-mediated “historical” events; and on the other, in its very disappearance, painting manifested its trans-medium resilience: forced to abandon a “sublime of transcendence”, it now engaged a “sublime of immanence”, as a way to expose a new kind of questionable, technoscientific sublimity, one capable of testifying to the ever-expanding limits of experience through verifiable and accountable facts.<sup>69</sup> By placing a painting on a wall, Monory allowed Lyotard to come the closest to a Salon-inspired hanging. But this sublime was only skin deep, immanent, and the clash between painting and the “mass media” (in this case, photography) left only a paradoxical quasi-monochrome in its wake. In the end, it is colour that appears most apt at recording the catastrophe of the sublime’s “défaillance”, its seizure or failure.<sup>70</sup>

Colour, in both Monory’s *Explosion* and in the overall scenography of *Les Immatériaux*, underscored the distance covered since modernism’s “sublime of transcendence”, and the essential witness function performed by the “sublime of immanence”. According to Lyotard, Buren’s use of colour fulfils much the same function as Monory’s – that of testifying to a foreclosed logic of presentation, “in favour of the forbidden ‘colour’”.<sup>71</sup> This last quote is from an

68 Jean-François Lyotard, “Economie libidinale du dandy”, in *L’Assassinat de l’expérience par la peinture, Monory* (Paris: Le Castor astral 1984), p. 48.

69 Lyotard, “Esthétique sublime du tueur à gages”, in *L’Assassinat de l’expérience par la peinture, Monory*, p. 152–154.

70 Lyotard, “Esthétique sublime du tueur à gages”, p. 143.

71 Jean-François Lyotard, *Que peindre? Adami Arakawa Buren*, vol.1 La Vue le Texte (Paris: Editions de la Différence, 1987), p. 110.

essay Lyotard published on Buren in 1987, in which one cannot help but notice a similarity between Lyotard's descriptions of Buren's work and those of *Les Immatériaux* two years before: "For Buren, the support, the site, ideology, are all the more noticeable as pragmatic operators when they go unnoticed, and the same goes for their exhibition. It is not a question of educating, but rather of refining the pragmatic tricks [*ruses*] that enable the works to be effective. But then, for whom, if it goes unnoticed? What is the destination of this meta-destined work? In any case, rather a sub-exposure (or sub-exhibition)."<sup>72</sup>

Buren's significance for *Les Immatériaux* could easily be overlooked, as the artist's work did not appear at all on the fifth floor of the Centre Pompidou, but only in the *Epreuves d'écriture* volume of the exhibition catalogues, whose white monochrome cover would prove the ideal foil for Buren's invisible "sub-exposure/-exhibition". In concealing the work of a painter known for his seemingly endless variations on colour, Lyotard may have had in mind a project Buren made in 1977 entitled *Les Couleurs: Sculptures*. Buren's project, produced for the Pompidou in its inaugural year, consisted in flags, bearing his famous motif of alternating white and coloured vertical bands, flying from Paris rooftops. The flags were to be seen from the Pompidou's terrace, where telescopes were available to help visitors locate the tiny, often scarcely visible spots of coloured cloth on the horizon. In his account of *Les Couleurs*, Lyotard lays particular stress on the difference between experiencing the project after the fact, as documented through photography, and the actual effort of trying to spot the flags across the cityscape. While Buren's own photographic records of *Les Couleurs* are, Lyotard writes, "monocular, linear, fixed, definitive", the process of scanning the horizon from the museum had the effect of producing a "melodic curve" capable of dispensing "rhythms" that "disorganise and organise vision", revealing in the process "to what extent the art gaze [*le regard d'art*] is subject to generally unconscious chronic conditions".<sup>73</sup> By removing Buren's trademark stripes from *Les Immatériaux* altogether, Lyotard was side-stepping the medium-specific modernist distinction between Cézanne and Niépce, focusing instead on the far more critical question of how to "visibly expose what is not visible in the exhibition itself".<sup>74</sup>

For Lyotard, this question was best posed by paradoxical artists such as Duchamp, Monory and Buren, for whom "painting" represents a philosophical as well as phenomenological test – and for whom, moreover, the ultimate test resides in "painting"'s colour. Just as for these "painters" colour serves both to reveal and to dissimulate their respective mediums – pigment in the service of olfactory experience in Duchamp's *Torture-Morte* and *Eau de voilette*, the bleached canvas turned photographic support for Monory, and Buren's elision

72 Lyotard, *Que peindre?*, p.108.

73 Ibid., p. 90, 103, and 110.

74 Ibid., p. 99.

of painting from the museum – so the ominous and uniform “demanding” grey of *Les Immatériaux* shrouded visitor and artwork alike in a disorienting and unbound monochrome that simultaneously obscured the museum to better expose it as a fundamentally unmanageable, complex temporal space subject to “unconscious chronic conditions”. As Françoise Coblence has argued, the presence of colour in Lyotard’s work “remains insistent, as if coming from a time that nothing, no postmodern condition, can erase and which the insistence on anamnesis will bring back”. Coblence goes on to suggest that, for Lyotard, the *phônè* of the human voice is to the silence hidden within language what colour is to the invisibility immanent in “painting”.<sup>75</sup>

This equation between the immateriality of colour or human voice and the essential, ineffable element of what constitutes an artwork seems to lend credence to Lyotard’s and Chaput’s claim that *Les Immatériaux* “merely presents to the eyes and ears some of the effects [of a new sensibility], as would a work of art”.<sup>76</sup> But to grant *Les Immatériaux* art-like status, a number of operations of working-through, or anamnesis, must first be performed: of the modern in the postmodern; of the pictorial or fictional field in the exhibition space (as Diderot did in his report on the 1767 Salon); and of colour (or voice) in the pictorial/fictional field (as manifested in *Les Immatériaux*, in particular, through Duchamp, Monory and Buren). These permutations are what destabilise any authorship the anthropocentric “I” may have over a “work” – be it of art – and transform the singular subject into a participant in a collective *heterologia*.<sup>77</sup>

We may debate whether *Les Immatériaux* successfully dramatised these reversals; whether, that is, Lyotard and Chaput managed, as Lyotard put it, to “convert anxiety into joyfulness” and “displace the tragic nature of writing into humour”.<sup>78</sup> Yet what is undeniable is that, true to Freud’s definition of anamnesis as a first step in the analytic treatment, the working-through of *Les Immatériaux* has only just begun – not in search of any definitive origin or answer, but as a potentially endless chain of phrases in which Lyotard’s commitment to an “initial forgetting” at the Centre Pompidou in 1985 still pressures us to take part.<sup>79</sup>

75 Françoise Coblence, “Les Peintres de Jean-François Lyotard”, in Corinne Enaudeau *et al.* (eds), *Les Transformateurs Lyotard* (Paris: Sens & Tonka, 2008), p. 93, and 96.

76 Early published press release (PCA 1977001/130).

77 Jean-François Lyotard, “La Philosophie et la peinture à l’ère de leur expérimentation”, in Anne Cazenave and Jean-François Lyotard (eds), *L’Art des confins: Mélanges offerts à Maurice de Gandillac* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), p. 468–469.

78 Jean-François Lyotard, “Post-scriptum”, *Epreuves d’écriture*, p. 262.

79 On an “initial forgetting” see Lyotard, “Note sur le sens de ‘post’”, in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, p. 119. For a clinical definition of anamnesis, refer to Sigmund Freud, “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896), in *Standard Edition*, James Strachey *et al.* (eds.), vol. III, (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), p. 191–192.

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# The Production of *Les Immatériaux*

Jean-Louis Boissier

in conversation with Andreas Broeckmann

Andreas Broeckmann: Jean-Louis Boissier, you were involved in *Les Immatériaux* both as an artist who was responsible for one of the installations, *Le Bus*, and as a scientific advisor on electronic and digital images. While the three main people involved in the project – Thierry Chaput, Philippe Délis, and of course Jean-François Lyotard – are no longer alive, several people who worked on *Les Immatériaux*, like yourself, still keep their memories and personal archives. *The* published documentation of *Les Immatériaux* has remained, up until today, quite incomplete, and there seems to have been no systematic documentation of this important show. This fact stands in a strange contrast to the unquestioned historical significance of the project – perhaps even more so today, than 30 years ago? Do you think there was an awareness of the importance of the show at the time?

Jean-Louis Boissier: Yes, absolutely. There was a clear sense of the cultural and the philosophical importance of the exhibition, symbolised most clearly in the presence of Jean-François Lyotard. Even then he was one of the internationally most well-known philosophers, and *Les Immatériaux* was identified as “Lyotard’s exhibition”.

Lyotard framed the exhibition with his texts and ideas, he reorganised and renamed much of what was already there and integrated the elements of the exhibition. In fact he provided the overall narrative for the exhibition in his texts for the catalogue and the exhibition walls. He himself said that his only, but very decisive scenographic, or dramaturgic idea, was the use of the soundtrack played via headphones, so that people would walk through the exhibition listening to spoken texts,



different in the various zones of the exhibition space on the 5th floor of the Centre Pompidou – so to speak, “listening to Lyotard”.

But it is important to recognise that the preparations for this exhibition had already been underway since 1981, so more than two years before Lyotard came onto the scene. For instance, the idea for arranging the materials in different sites, organised not in a linear sequence but in different parallel tracks, these conceptual ideas were already there when Lyotard arrived.

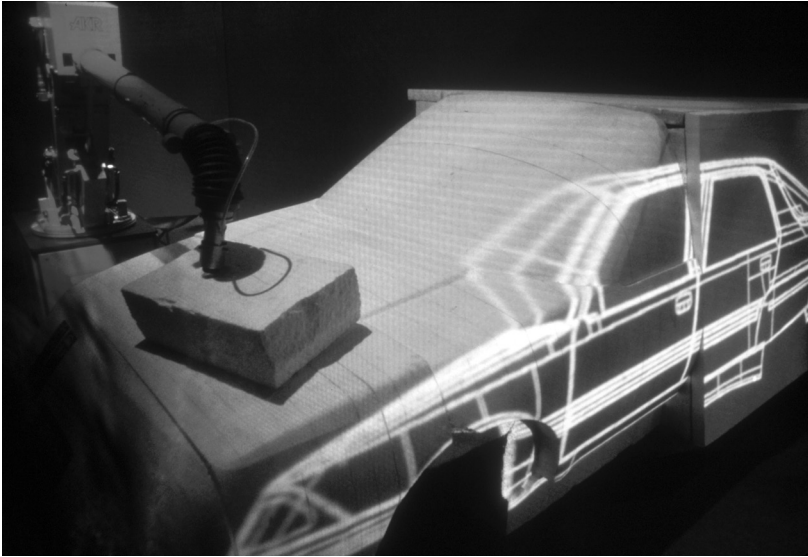
An exhibition with the working title “Nouveaux matériaux et création” had first been conceived at the initiative of Jacques Mullender, director of the Centre de Création Industrielle, CCI, in the early 1980s. Mullender was the CCI’s director from 1976 to 1982, followed by Paul Blanquart from 1982 to 1984. The exhibition project was then decisively pushed forward under the direction of François Burckhardt between 1984 and 1990.

The CCI and the Musée National d’Art Moderne (MNAM), were separate departments of the Centre Pompidou at the time – they were fused only in 1992 – and the CCI played a very interesting and important role before the opening and during the first years of the Centre Pompidou. The CCI had been founded by François Mathey and François Barré in 1969, and it was integrated into the structure of the Centre Pompidou in 1972. Barré later became the director of the Centre Pompidou, from 1993 to 1996. The CCI was much closer to societal developments at the time than were the other departments, the MNAM, the library, Bibliothèque Publique d’Information, BPI, and the centre for sound and music research, IRCAM. After *Les Immatériaux*, this changed, there were fewer exhibitions dedicated to design and technology, and the quarterly review of the CCI, *Traverses*, edited since 1975 by Jean Baudrillard and Michel de Certeau, Marc Le Bot, Paul Virilio, etc., was discontinued in 1994.

In order to understand the origin of *Les Immatériaux*, it would be interesting to look more closely at the politics and opinions in France in general during those years, and those of the Centre Pompidou in particular, because for instance the changes in the direction of the departments also meant changes in the thematic emphasis that these people placed.

AB: How were these processes related to *Les Immatériaux*?

JLB: *Les Immatériaux* was an initiative of the CCI, a project in which all other departments of the Pompidou Center also had to participate, not least for political reasons. In a sense, it was a bit of an alibi project, claiming that, look, we can all work together. In retrospect, this exercise in interdisciplinarity may, ironically, have been a factor for the consequent reversal



[Figure 4] Exhibition view, site *Auto-engendrement* (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

to a greater separation of the departments, and the integration of the CCI into the Museum in the mid-1990s. *Les Immatériaux* was probably the last big exhibition of the CCI.

I don't think that this reorientation happened because of *Les Immatériaux*, but the project was the occasion on which the separation happened. This was part of a broader development in cultural institutions during those years, the tail end of changes that happened during the Mitterrand years in the 1980s.

AB: What was the situation with regard to the project when Lyotard arrived in the winter of 1983/84?

JLB: The project had been initiated in 1981 and was lead by Thierry Chaput, a curator and theoretician of design. Chaput and a team of several people were researching and collecting materials for an exhibition on the way in which new materials and new technologies were changing the conditions of industrial and cultural production. The CCI had done various exhibitions on new technologies, for instance on computers, together with Atari in 1983. But here they wanted to combine everything: architecture, biology, design, literature [Figure 4]. In 1982, they were yet lacking a global idea, a guiding thought or concept, but the thematic field that the exhibition was supposed to cover was more or less clear.

However, around the spring of 1983, the project was supposed to be abandoned, because the directors of the Centre Pompidou and of the CCI did not believe that it could be successfully realised. That's when they had the idea to call on an external curator. There were different names in the discussion. One was that of the curator Frank Popper, who opened the major exhibition "Electra" dealing with the relation of art and electricity in the twentieth century, at the end of 1983. I don't know who then had the idea of asking Lyotard, but the CCI was known at the time to be close to contemporary philosophy, for example with *Traverses*.

AB: Lyotard was commissioned to write a treatment that would suggest a thematic framework already in May 1983, which he delivered to the CCI in a sketch ("*Esquisse*") dated 10 August 1983. This is a document in which he contested the three terms used in the original working title for the exhibition, new ("*nouveau*"), materials ("*matériaux*"), and creation ("*création*"), and instead proposed the title *Les Immatériaux*.

JLB: This is true. However, I believe that this text by Lyotard was largely based on the visual and factual material that Thierry Chaput and the team of the CCI had collected, hence also their reflections on the new conditions of "materiality". I know for a fact that Lyotard's thoughts were directly influenced by Chaput, who was concerned for Lyotard to know about the contemporary technosciences. Lyotard reflected this, for instance, in remarks made in his book *The Postmodern Explained to Children* (1986), which contains a "Letter to Thomas Chaput", the young child of Thierry Chaput, in which Lyotard points out the technoscientific development and its relationship with humanity. These were themes which were also part of our discussions with Chaput at the time.

If you look at Chaput's notes and sketches from 1982 and 1983, you can see how many aspects of the exhibition project that then became *Les Immatériaux* were already in place: the spatial structure, the sites, even some of the themes and titles of the sites. Also, Philippe Délis had been selected as the exhibition architect and scenographer before Lyotard joined the project. As far as I know, nobody has really analysed in detail how much of the exhibition was preconceived when Lyotard arrived, but I think that one will find that many things were already there.

AB: How did you get involved in *Les Immatériaux*?

JLB: I had been in Paris since 1969/70, based at the Centre Universitaire Expérimental de Vincennes, a place that deliberately operated outside of the norms of the French university system, with an art faculty that included not only fine arts, music, etc., but also film and theatre.

I had worked with Frank Popper, who was the director of the art department in Vincennes, on the kinetic art exhibition, *Lumière et Mouvement* (Paris, 1967), and participated in the exhibition *Cinétisme Spectacle Environnement*, which we organised together in Grenoble in 1968. I did not really keep working in this field of kinetic and cinematic art throughout the 1970s, in the environment of Vincennes, which was seen as both experimental and as home to leftist political groups. But it was sort of an “agitprop” context in which I developed, at the time – ideas for what one would today call cinematic and non-linear installations which implied interactive aspects and the participation of the viewer – and to give another ideological meaning to the notion of interactivity, which originally referred to “human-machine relations”.

In 1980, the school, which was also named “Université Paris-8”, moved from Vincennes to Saint-Denis. We returned from the dogmatism of leftist theory and Popper got interested again in the themes that had occupied him in the 1960s. There was an invitation to Popper and us, his group at Saint-Denis, by the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, together with the national electricity company EDF, to create an exhibition. The budget was one million Francs – a lot of money at the time. This project became the exhibition *Electra* in 1983–1984, which I worked on as Popper’s assistant, and as catalogue editor. It became a magnificent exhibition which also the museum curators and many other colleagues were involved in – Edmond Couchot especially for the digital section, a first.

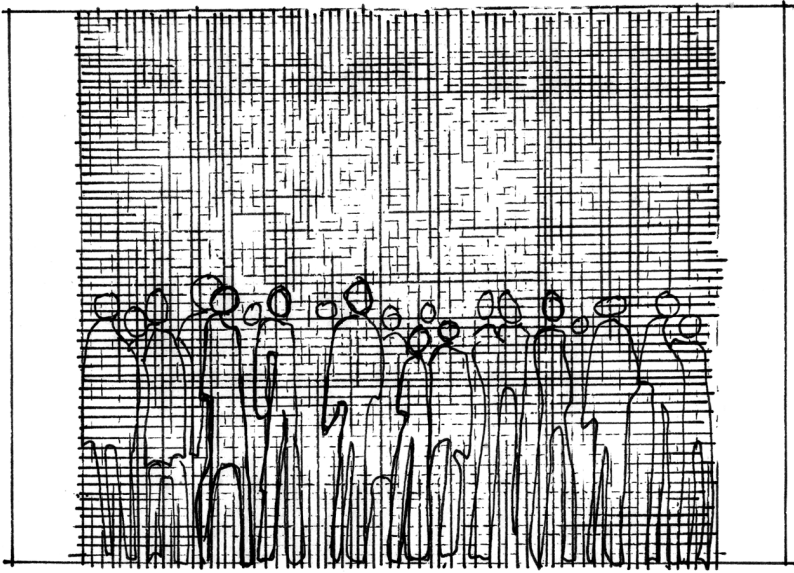
At one point in 1982, in a conversation at the museum with members of the team, we discussed critically that *Electra* looked only at the effect of electricity and electronics on art, not on the applied arts, design, architecture, etc. We wanted to see whether this lack could be alleviated, and in order to get advice, it seemed an obvious choice at this point to turn to the CCI at the Centre Pompidou. I knew the people there and went to speak with them about *Electra*. So I had a conversation with Thierry Chaput, one of the CCI’s project leaders with a focus on design, and during that conversation Chaput said that they were already preparing a project on “new materials of creation” (“nouveaux matériaux et création”). During that conversation I found out about the project which was already underway – perhaps Chaput had come to the CCI in order to work on this project, I don’t know. Chaput was interested in my research background and we immediately agreed that I would cooperate on the CCI’s exhibition project. Chaput was looking for constitutive elements for his project which, at that time, he already conceived as individual sites that would make up the exhibition as a whole.

Amongst other things, I talked to Chaput about the medium of the videodisc, which I had discovered through Michael Naimark’s interactive

video installation *Aspen Moviemap*. It had been shown in the influential exhibition, *Cartes et figures de la terre* (1980) at the Centre Pompidou, a large exhibition with a very good catalogue, about the important theme of cartography, with historical, contemporary and also artistic items. This exhibition was realised, by the CCI together with the BPI and the MNAM. For me, this exhibition was important because it made the link between art and informatics, which was also the theme of a working group that we had had before in Vincennes, the Groupe Art et Informatique de Vincennes (GAIV) and that included people like Hervé Huitric, Monique Nass, Michel Bret and others; Margit Rosen has studied their activities in the context of her research on the New Tendencies movement. I was not part of this group, but I agreed to try to introduce digital technologies in our art department, with regard to the concept of interactivity, a word which did not really exist at the time.

I had the idea that I wanted to develop something that would be interactive, combining the technical possibilities of the videodisc with the new ideas about production and distribution of film, the participation of the viewer, etc. I told Chaput that I had projects with interactive videodiscs which I had developed, for instance, for a competition for videodisc scenarios organised by the Chilean film curator Raul Ruiz for INA, the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel, in 1982/83. Chaput liked my suggestions and agreed to include such a cooperation with the course on visual arts of Paris 8 and its specialisation, led by Edmont Couchot, on new image technologies, in the CCI's exhibition project on new materials. This cooperation was formalised in a contract between our university and the Centre Pompidou in April 1984, and eventually led to several projects of digital images, interactive installations, and copy art, as well as the project *Le Bus*, which was produced and financed for *Les Immatériaux* by the Centre Pompidou. It was an expensive and laborious production that I worked on with several of my students, and that I would not have been able to do at the university alone.

After this initial encounter with Chaput, I went back to Frank Popper and said that the Centre Pompidou was already working on an exhibition about the new developments in design, so the plans for *Electra* remained unchanged with their focus on art. But from that time on I worked in parallel with Popper on *Electra*, and with Chaput on what would become *Les Immatériaux*. I spent more time on *Electra*, but stayed in close contact with Chaput and his team throughout the following years. For instance, as part of our research for the exhibition I went with Chaput to the national audio-visual festival Imagina at Monte Carlo in 1983, and to the Siggraph computer graphics fair in the United States.



[Figure 5] Philippe Délis: *Drawing of audience behind gauze fabric*, [no date] (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky)

AB: How did you experience the cooperation with Lyotard?

JLB: I already knew Lyotard because we were in the same faculty at Paris 8, though of course he was a generation older and an international star, so we were not close.

Unlike at the university, I found him extremely open in the context of the exhibition preparation at the CCI – very generous – he accepted almost everything that was proposed. He was not there as a curator who would select things, but rather as the intellectual who would connect and line up the things that were already there. He did bring in the architect Peter Eisenman, and some artworks by Moholy-Nagy, Monory – those were his choices. But the more technical things – the robots, the smells – these had been discovered by the CCI team. Lyotard would often intervene in the discussion very affirmatively, for instance on clothing, saying, “ah, yes” (“ah, oui”), or on the skin, “ah, yes”.

The core group were Jean-Francois Lyotard, Thierry Chaput and Philippe Délis, and most things were decided between the three of them [Figure 5]. Lyotard, importantly, gave a theoretical and a literary dimension to the project. He worked a lot on his own texts for the *Inventaire* and other aspects of the project, as well as on the selection of texts used for the soundtrack. In fact, texts were the most visible item presented on electronic screens: telematic novels, text and image cooperations through the

Minitel, generative poetry and literature. The major interactive writing project, *Épreuves d'écriture*, was inspired by the British cybernetic artist Roy Ascott, and in its final realisation strongly influenced by Lyotard. But again, the idea for this project was already there, and Chaput had already made the contact with the Olivetti company – the sponsor of the computers – before Lyotard arrived. The idea to suspend the whole exhibition from the ceiling no doubt came from Délis, and it was confirmed by Lyotard who liked the concept. Chaput, in contrast, brought in the enormous knowledge of possible objects and things to do and show, and all the contacts with researchers and cooperation partners.

There were many people working on the different projects for the exhibition. We had students involved, and there were lots of other research institutions involved with the CCI in similar ways. At that point I was only the intermediary between my university's research sector and Chaput and his team. The cooperation process was organised at the CCI by Chaput's team of maybe 20 people. Lyotard regularly organised seminars or working groups ("groupes de réflexion"), for instance with Jean-Pierre Balpe from ALAMO (Atelier de Littérature Assistée par la Mathématique et les Ordinateurs), the informatics branch of OULIPO, with Paul Braffort and Jacques Roubaud, who spoke about generative text. Lyotard organised these seminars not only to learn things, but also to get an idea of what issues people were arguing and fighting about.

I was a member of one of these working groups, where I was considered as someone who could speak about the new, digital modalities of the image, but also about teletext and telematics, computer graphics and copy art. There were several projects at Paris 8 which were of interest in this context, and of course it then played a role that Lyotard was also on the faculty of Paris 8 – the same faculty which also included philosophers like Deleuze, Chatelet, Badiou, Rancière, and artists like Orlan. Another colleague at Paris-8 was Jean-Paul Fargier, an artist and theoretician of video and friend of Nam June Paik, who cooperated in *Les Immatériaux* on aspects of video art and surveillance.

Lyotard was a "leader" – some saw him as a "guru" – who gave an image and a face to a practice that was present, and that was drawn together for the exhibition from different fields. The Centre Pompidou had decided to make an exhibition with a philosopher as "commissaire" – not really a curator, but rather an "author". He was able, in that situation, to pose the problem that the exhibition wanted to address. And although Lyotard mostly only confirmed the ideas for the planned exposition, in a political sense he probably saved the exhibition. Lyotard was brought in as an external expert – external not only to the Centre, but also external to the profession of exhibition curators and organisers. One could speculate





[Figure 6] Exhibition view, site *Labyrinthe du langage* (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, photograph by Jean-Claude Planchet).

that, when the first phase of research and conceptualisation of the exhibition didn't really lead to concrete results, Lyotard was perhaps installed in order to demonstrate that the CCI was not able itself to realise such a complicated project.

Lyotard pushed the team of the CCI, which was used to produce a solid, pedagogical, efficacious exhibition, so that they would make a "manifestation" which in itself would be "a work of art". He really put it like that – "une œuvre d'art" – and used terms like "opera", "dramaturgy", "scenography", "constellation of poetic and literary image-objects". Lyotard's philosophical approach meant a departure from established models, towards a work of a radically new type in which texts played an exceptionally big role, in titles, the signage, the printed materials, the soundtrack. *Les Immatériaux* was considered an intellectual success, but it was also seen as an exhibition that was difficult for the public. The sensitivity of the visitors was tested in different ways – they were not only addressed as viewers, but also as listeners and readers, who had to find their own way through the maze of the exhibition.

AB: I would like to speak a bit more about the artistic program of *Les Immatériaux*, which not only included "canonical avant-garde artists", but also some of the contemporary video installation artists like Dan Graham, Thierry Kunzel, Catherine Ikam, and Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki. At the time, holography was one of the exciting and enigmatic new media technology, which was represented in *Les Immatériaux* through



works by Alexander, Stephen Benton, Doug Tyler, and Claudine Eizyckman and Guy Fihman. And your own interactive installation, *Le Bus*, and your collaboration with Liliane Terrier, *Toutes les copies*, as well as the interactive sound installation by Rolf Gehlhaar, were all by artists closely connected to Paris, and with IRCAM, La Villette, and Paris 8 [Figure 17]. The semiotic aspects of *Les Immatériaux* were closely related to the discussions on signs and language which played an important role in the 1960s, connected with linguistics and the semiotic analysis of culture. These discussions were reflected in the conceptual art of the 1960s and '70s, which were prominently represented in the exhibition with works by Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Kosuth, Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein, Robert Barry and Ian Wilson. My point here would be that the choice of works by these artists was probably appropriate, but not very original: Their works had been collected by the Paris museums and was readily available for presentation; they were here as place-holders for a specific reflection on signification, not so much as original works.

In general, I have the impression that the artistic program of the exhibition avoided strongly speculative positions, and that the use of artworks was not as independent works, but rather as objects tied up into a theoretical argument. Similarly, it was not intended that one would experience, for instance, the soundtrack as an independent and self-contained piece, but always as part of an overall confrontation with the sites in the exhibition. The artworks were woven into the texture of the exhibition as part of the overall argument, even if they were there to make the argument in a form that was explicitly not textual, but visceral, whether visual, auditory, haptic or olfactory.

JLB: I think it is necessary that we are careful when we speak about the status of these different elements of the exhibition. Some of the things that you mention, *Le Bus*, or *Toutes les copies*, were not really considered as artworks ("*œuvres*") at the time. The things that were considered as artworks were mostly those which came from the MNAM, through its curator Bernard Blistène. And some of the exhibition visitors would perceive these works as artworks when they walked through the exhibition. But in terms of the overall scenography, there are not really "works" in the exhibition, but "sites", constellations, each of which had been realised not by one author, but by several people.

It would probably be interesting to reconsider the list of exhibition items and see which of the things that were in the show would today be considered as artworks – this will definitely have changed for some of them. At the time, this was not an issue; in fact the idea that some things were different from others because they were artworks was rejected as ideological [Figure 6].

## romans à faire

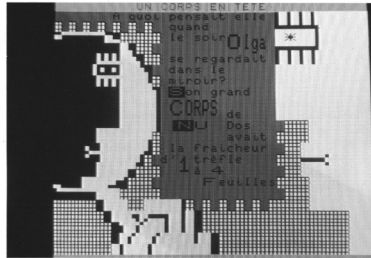
Vivez en vitesse le roman de faire un roman. A partir de bribes ou d'indices, reconstruisez «votre» histoire, et apprenez d'elle «la réalité» imaginaire que vous désirez.

## l'objet perdu

Fiction télématique, interprétation du mythe d'Oïsis. La structure informatique est un corps analogue à celui d'Oïsis. Le spectateur, dans son travail de reconstruction à la recherche d'Isis, qui rassemble et réunit. Ce corps imaginaire s'organise en ensembles «anatomiques», suggérés par les titres des écrans principaux. L'histoire, bien que soumise aux caprices du lecteur, comporte tous les éléments qui président à la lecture d'un roman: action, événements, anis sur l'image, personnages, considérations génériques, etc. L'œuvre est composée selon trois temps:

- la première phase sert à faire connaître au spectateur un des nombreux parcours possibles du récit;
- la seconde l'informe d'une «destruction» partielle de ce qui vient de lire;
- la troisième lui propose de réécrire une histoire sur la base des «restes» de sa consultation.

Chaque spectateur a un parcours dans le récit qui lui est propre.



1. Page écran vidéo du roman, «Oïsis perdu».  
2. Montage à partir d'une affiche de S. et J. Juppé.

## jus d'orange

Fiction policière télématique. C'est à la fois un roman policier à énigme classique et un «romancier» permettant des lectures diverses, au gré du lecteur-enquêteur qui peut suivre à sa guise les divers interrogatoires, jusqu'à la proposition de deux solutions différentes. Le roman se compose de 476 écrans de moins de quinze lignes; chaque écran contient un ou deux indices (vrais ou faux). Le «lecteur» a le



rôle de l'enquêteur, et ses choix doivent porter:

- sur la prise de connaissance ou la vérification des indices;
- sur l'ordre d'interrogatoire des témoins;
- sur la consultation de documents ou de leurs commentaires;
- sur les solutions de l'énigme;
- sur la résolution des «dilemme ou lecteur».

[Figure 7] *Inventaire*, site *Romans à faire*, recto (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

In fact, I believe that *Les Immatériaux* was such a success because it was not an art exhibition. It would be a bit excessive to call it a “philosophical exhibition”, but it was its quality to make a more general proposal about the current relationship between culture, science and technology. And it provided not only a philosophical commentary, but a story, a scenario. It helped many people to pass on to a different state, a different way of thinking and working. For me personally, another exhibition that I curated was also very important in this line – *Machines à communiquer* (1990), a technoscientific exhibition about virtual reality and networks, which also had an important artistic component. Networks had already been present in *Electra* – for instance with works by Roy Ascott and Fred Forest – and they definitely played an important role in the conceptualisation of *Les Immatériaux*.

Another thing to remember is that there were a number of young artists who are not easily recognisable as authors, yet who contributed to *Les Immatériaux* various Minitel projects, online novels, etc. Their work, I believe, played a very important role for the aesthetics of the exhibition, especially because of their treatment of texts.

Let me give you some examples – and for the historical re-evaluation, we must keep in mind that there is a difference between what is in the catalogue and what was actually on show. For instance, in the site *Mémoires artificielles*, there was a variety of screens which presented texts. The site was organised by Frederic Devalay for the BPI library and dealt with

the notion of telematics and telecommunication. I believe that when we put together a list of the contemporary artists who were involved in *Les Immatériaux*, we must include Frederic Develay, who was exploring new forms of text, of reading and writing. He was also involved in the site *Champ et mouvement de la voix*, in which several well-known French artists participated, including Bernard Noël, Bernard Heidsieck, writers of concrete poetry, and Alain Longuet, who experimented with video and how to couple it with the digital. The people who organised the site *Romans à faire* – Jacques-Elie Chabert, Jean-Paul Martin, Camille Philibert and Dominique Horvilleur – worked on the writing of novels using the Minitel system; they produced silkscreen prints and were part of fanzine culture [Figure 7]. Or think of Marc Denjean, who did, amongst other things, a Minitel project for the site *Séquences à moduler*, realised in cooperation with ENSCI (École Normal Supérieure de Création Industrielle) – at the time a new, industry-oriented design school in Paris with which Chaput had forged a cooperation. You will see that Denjean's name crops up several times in the *Inventaire*.

These are only some of the artists who are somewhat hidden from view when you first look at *Les Immatériaux*, but who played an important role for the connection of art and technology, both in the exhibition itself, and in the time afterwards. *Les Immatériaux* brought together projects and people, mainly but not only from Paris, who were already working in this field, but it also catalysed the work that everybody was doing. And many of these contacts existed before Lyotard joined the project – this whole dimension of *Les Immatériaux* was somewhat beyond Lyotard's involvement.

AB: If we look at the relationship between *Les Immatériaux* and the 1983 exhibition *Electra*, we notice that at least 14 of the twentieth-century artists in *Les Immatériaux* had also appeared in *Electra*, two years before. It seems that the choice of artists for *Les Immatériaux* was largely based on work that was known and available in and around Paris in 1984/85. The selection for the exhibition was partly based on a rather conservative understanding of established positions in contemporary art, partly also on the presence of artists in Paris, in order to be able to develop with them new works, or adaptations of existing work.

An interesting case is that of the installation you and Liliane Terrier put together for the site *Toutes les copies*, where the visitors were invited to make such photocopies of objects or body parts themselves, assisted by somebody from the exhibition team. Two years earlier, in *Electra*, you had curated a section on *Electro-photography* which had presented works of "copy art" made with photocopying machines, and which was introduced, in the catalogue, with an essay in which you also made reference to the



[Figure 8] Exhibition visitor, site *Labyrinthe du langage* (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, photograph by Jean-Claude Planchet).

seminal work of the educator Sonia Sheridan, based at the Art Institute of Chicago.

JLB: You are right, several artists in *Les Immatériaux* were also part of *Electra*. In retrospect, we can say that *Electra* was sort of an exploration for some of the things which were then presented in *Les Immatériaux*. Because of this connection, *Les Immatériaux* has also become a significant moment for the history of electronic art, and part of the history of the digital – a staging of its mythology of emergence. But at the time one did not speak of “electronic art”, even though electronic and digital technologies were having a significant impact in the arts – think especially of music where this technical development had already been going on for two decades at least, and did not pose a problem any more. Equally in literature – through the work of, for instance, the ALAMO group, which was important for Balpe and others – there was an awareness of the impact that the new digital production and distribution media had on literature. And people like Hervé Huitric, Monique Nass and Michel Bret were working on computer graphics which, in their view, would *save* painting; and at the same time they were working with the Renault factory on car designs.

These people were involved in the exhibition, yet at the time *Les Immatériaux* was not considered an exhibition of electronic and digital art. In *Electra* there was a clear division, marked by the influence of Edmont Couchot, where there was something that can be called digital art, even if the word did not exist then. But it took several years before this trend was

confirmed – for instance in the *Artifices* biennial, which I organised from 1990 to 1996.

Take, for instance, the exhibition *Image calculé*, which I organised together with Chaput and Délis in 1988, at the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie. This was not an art exhibition, but it contained many artworks, and things made by artists. In the same year, 1988, we also organised the “art show” of Siggraph France. We can probably say that the notion of digital art really appeared in that year. Only retrospectively one can say that *Les Immatériaux* was one of the stations in this development – and a special one, because here the respective works were not presented as digital art.

AB: You spoke about the development of the exhibition project before it became *Les Immatériaux*. How did this trajectory continue after the exhibition closed?

JLB: One aspect to mention in this context is that there were projects that had been planned for *Les Immatériaux* but were not realised – Edmont Couchot's *La Plume*, for instance, required powerful computers that were only available when the project was premiered in 1988 in the exhibition at la Grand Halle de La Villette, which I organised together with Chaput. Another very significant follow-up was *Passages de l'image*, curated by Cathérine David, Raymond Bellour and Christine van Assche at the Centre Pompidou in 1990. The installation that I realised for this exhibition, of a high artistic level, was not strictly an artwork, but contained a selection of scientific images and was intended to reveal the way in which contemporary art was affected by digital images.

From this contact arose the commission by the Centre Pompidou for the experimental exhibition format of the *Revue virtuelle*, which I curated from 1991 until 1997, the year when the Centre Pompidou closed for renovations for several years. *Revue virtuelle* was a permanent exhibition which sought to show to the broader public how the digital was intervening in all domains of contemporary society. This was a project initiated by the MNAM – not an “art project” in the narrow sense, but one about contemporary aesthetics.

For me, *Les Immatériaux* was an exception to this trajectory, because it did not have a narrow agenda – it wasn't there to defend a particular domain. The presence of Lyotard made this possible. Many of the other exhibitions, until today, have a particular thematic or technical focus, serving certain cliques. *Les Immatériaux* didn't do that at all. That's one of the reasons why the exhibition has attained a somewhat mythical reputation. It was diverse and departed in all sorts of different directions, yet maintained a high level of quality.

AB: Also for the audience?

JLB: I think it did, not least because there were so many screens in the exhibition [Figure 8]. The Minitel, introduced in 1982, was already quite present and artists and writers were working with it, but I believe that what the general audience remembered from *Les Immatériaux* was the appearance of digital communication through networks and screens. This impression was strengthened, I believe, by the fact that they had the headphones, for even if this was technically something different than networked communication, the fact that everybody was wearing the headphones on their heads, gave a very particular image. This is why Lyotard insisted so much on this aspect – it was not only about the texts that were transmitted, but it was also part of the whole scenography, the performance of *Les Immatériaux*. The experience of the exhibition was strongly determined by this interactive distribution of the texts through the infrared emission in the different zones. People understood that this was a metaphor for what would later happen with the web.

This conversation took place on 20 November 2014, at ENSAD, Paris.



# ***The Bus of Les Immatériaux***

**Jean-Louis Boissier**

In what follows I describe how the interactive videodisc installation *The Bus* was conceived and produced, and how it responded to the will to experimentally inscribe technics at the crossroads of art and ethnography. This may in turn help shed some light on the philosophical exhibition *Les Immatériaux* within which it appeared.

## **The Installation**

Within the labyrinth of *Les Immatériaux*, in the pervasive darkness, a vertical, suspended vitrine presents an object which attracts our attention because it is instantly recognisable. It is a model, at 1/10 scale, and very detailed, very realist, of a Parisian bus [Figure 9]. But what draws our attention to it is that, on the little video screens placed behind the windows, there unfolds a filmed landscape which, illuminating the interior of this miniature bus with moving light, places us unmistakably, both perceptually and mentally, in the position of a passenger. We see neighbourhoods, private homes, gardens, buildings, working-class towns, wastelands, market gardens, the university, and always the sky, and views into the distance. Perhaps without noticing it, in pulling ourselves up and leaning in towards the object that offers this vision, we grab hold of a familiar form, the stainless steel column of the same bus, at full size this time. And above all, an object that offers itself up literally beneath our fingers, an aluminium button accompanied by a sign saying "Press for the Next Stop". I press the button, and a message lights up in red: "Stop Requested". A few seconds pass, and the loud noise of the engine and the rumbling of the road completely stop. The video landscape gives way to a series of photos which, changing in rapid succession, transport us, straight ahead and thus



perpendicular to the route of the bus, towards a house, through a door, into a room, and towards a person inside. In this way we will see a child at home and at school, follow a heavy goods vehicle driver delivering cars, discover how a gypsy woman dresses, watch a doctor's consultation, see a retired man in his worker's garden, find out something about the work of a dental technician, and so on. One hundred and twenty such portraits are available, each one consisting of 12, 24, 48, or 96 photographs. The viewer is distanced from the present time figured by the route of the bus, and follows the person instead, follows her home, or to her garden, to her work, in all her movements. We see personal objects, private and sentimental souvenirs. We feel a desire to see, a desire for intimacy, sometimes following somebody all the way into the bathroom, and very often into the family album. Each series of photographs ends on a close-up of a face with a name overlaid onto it: *Carmen, four and a half years old; Madame B., gardener; Madame T., bookseller; Amar, streetsweeper; Nathalie, 18 years old; a man, 91 years old; Alphonso, amateur boxer; Édouard, nurse*, etc. Pressing the button makes this name appear in a list that scrolls along in place of the tracking shot. Choosing a name becomes a way to go back to it. To get on the bus, one must go via a portrait.

At this stage of the description of the installation *Le Bus*, we are reminded of an image that has become emblematic of *Les Immatériaux*: each visitor wears a set of headphones, and is thus enclosed within a vocal space which ceaselessly transmits the texts selected by Jean-François Lyotard for each place. This particular place, this "site", is called *Visites simulées (Simulated Visits)* [Figure 10]. We hear phrases by Paul Virilio, taken from *Negative Horizon*, including this powerful aphorism: "*What will we wait for when we no longer need to wait to arrive?*",<sup>1</sup> a phrase that refers both to simulated events and to communication in "real time" – a term that would come to invade discourses beyond that of technology – generalized tele-observation, simultaneity, and ubiquity.

## Design

In fact, the reference to Paul Virilio's ideas is very much germane to our particular project. I read Virilio, I listened to him, I cited him to my students. As an architect and as a philosopher of technology, he anticipated the observation and critical investigation of new digital technologies. We worked in what he would soon designate as *trans-apparence*: "the sudden commutation of the perceptible is ultimately only the general herald of a generalized derealisation resulting from the new illumination of perceptual reality".<sup>2</sup> After the aerial photo-interpretation of the Great War, he revealed how the illumination of the military theatre had become indirect, a matter

1 Paul Virilio, *Negative Horizon* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 120.

2 Paul Virilio, *Polar Inertia*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Sage, 1999), p. 7.



[Figure 9] Jean-Louis Boissier: *Le Bus*, 1985, installation view, *Les Immatériaux*, site *Visites simulées* (Source: Jean-Louis Boissier).

of interconnected cathode-ray screens. But in doing so he came to identify “infographic technologies [which] will likewise force a readjustment of reality and of its representations”.<sup>3</sup> In this respect he mentioned Tactical Mapping System, a videodisc programme that history remembers under the name *Aspen Moviemap*.

I must emphasize here that it was precisely the discovery of this videodisc, within the vast and erudite exhibition *Cartes et figures de la terre (Maps and Figures of the Earth)*,<sup>4</sup> at the Centre Pompidou in 1980, that decisively opened up a new horizon for me. Ten years before, in 1969–1970, I had conceived, for GREC (*Groupe de recherches et d’essais cinématographiques*), a scenario which worked on numerous parallel levels of the filmic story furnished by the situation of a train passenger. The unfolding of the landscape, like a cinema tracking-shot, drew the viewer into houses wherein were played, or spoken, scenes borrowed from *Madame Bovary*, and then brought him back into the train, to discover there a contemporary scene with a certain family resemblance to Flaubert’s text. Its title, *Exercice de la découverte*, affirmed the scopic impulse stimulated by an opening in the scenery which, in the theatre, is known as a *découverte*. Thus my intuition was that the interactivity of the videodisc, its capacity to open onto bifurcating signifiers, the computational

3 Paul Virilio, *Lost Dimension* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), p. 26–27.

4 Catalogue: Jean-Loup Rivière (ed.), *Cartes et figures de la terre* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou/CCI, 1980).

combination of text and image, presented the opportunity for an artistic solution that ought to be seized.

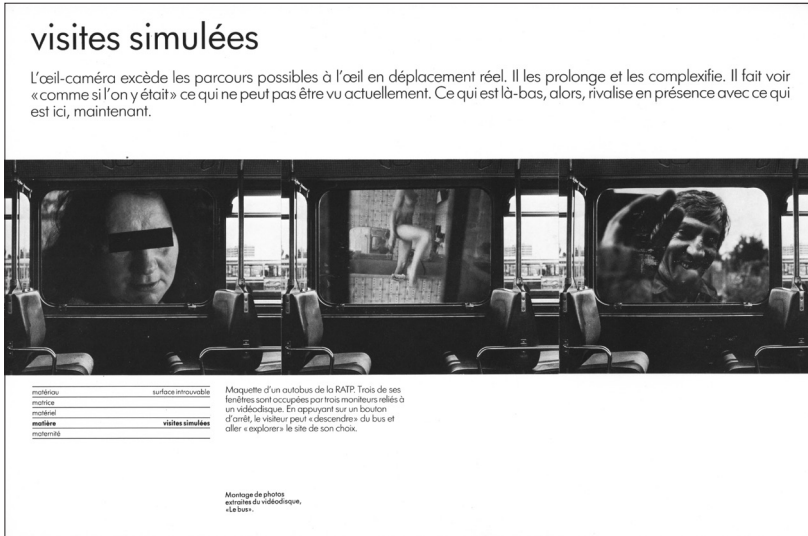
At the beginning of the '80s, as a teacher and as an artist, I pursued a conceptual approach to shooting, making use of photography and cinema, but above all of spatio-temporal protocols designed to challenge the doxa of creativity. "*Allez-y en Nikon [Go there in a Nikon]*", said a then-current advertising slogan, accompanied by a shot of space exploration. The camera is a vehicle – as it had been in the mid-nineteenth century for the photographic assignments of railway companies, in the 1930s for the American photographers of the FSA, and in the '60s and '70s for conceptual artists. "Shooting" refers to a succession of image-collections governed by a programme. In the videodisc this process would take on a concrete form. We spoke of photography or video "from the videodisc perspective" to signify the feedback effect of the interactive support on operations which, up until then, had taken their lead from printed books and the exhibition. Meanwhile, simultaneously, the idea came about to design interactivity on the models of the map, the book, and the exhibition. What I wanted to show was that, with videodiscs, and later with interactive video programs, the computer is not only able to build realities "out of nothing", but to organize real elements and allow access to them.

## Production

In 1983, a competition was launched in Paris by two public institutions, the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel and the Centre National d'Études des Télécommunications, for "interactive scenarios for videodisc" of a documentary or fictional nature. This was meant to be innovative, since "no one (or almost no one) has ever written one!" but it required entrants to establish "questions" and "controls" which were stereotyped from the outset. The scenario that I proposed refused these parameters, and *The Bus*, which came about at the same time, radicalised this attitude by making the interactive diagram a constitutive part of a behaviour which itself was borrowed from the real – captured, as one does when shooting.

Virilio's warnings on the military nature of the initial videodisc impelled us to substantially misappropriate the technology, even though we were attracted by its novelty. Some years later, Gilles Deleuze would tell us that we needed to "subvert" control:

the screen's no longer a window or a door (behind which...), nor a frame or surface (within which...), but a computer screen on which images as "data" slip around ... Cinema ought to stop being 'cinematic', stop playing, and set up specific relationships with video, with electronic and



[Figure 10] *Inventaire*, site *Visites simulées*, recto (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, photographs by Jean-Louis Boissier).

digital images, in order to develop a new form of resistance and combat the televisual function of surveillance and control.<sup>5</sup>

We have mentioned Gilles Deleuze, but not yet Jean-François Lyotard. Both were professors in our arts and philosophy faculty at Université Paris 8, which in 1980 moved from Vincennes to Saint-Denis. *Le Bus* was part of the project for an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou, led by the Centre de Création Industrielle (CCI), which was initiated in 1982. Working alongside Frank Popper (also a Professor at Paris 8) on *Electra*, the historical exhibition concerning “electricity and electronics in twentieth-century art” at the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris,<sup>6</sup> I was responsible for establishing a relationship with the CCI for works relating to design and architecture. I was then alerted to an exhibition that was being planned, and was considered as complementary to *Electra*, entitled *Matériaux nouveaux et création* (*New Materials and Creation*). The head of the project at the CCI, Thierry Chaput, immediately invited me to contribute as a researcher in art with my university. Unexpected means became available to produce and exhibit our videodisc.

A videodisc can contain 54,000 images – analogue video images, but attached to a digital code. Designing a programme for videodisc means imagining

5 Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to Serge Daney: Optimism, Pessimism, and Travel”, in *Negotiations 1972–1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 76.

6 *Electra*, Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 10 December, 1983–5 February, 1984. Directed by Frank Popper. Catalogue, 464 pages, French and English, designed by Jean-Louis Boissier.

a logic of relational sequences. Cinema (video), the chronophotographic sequence, the diaporama, are possible forms this might take. But our scenario relates strictly to the still image. A fictive line is determined, in a zone of this mixed suburb some distance from Paris, which contains the university. On one hand, for eight months during 1984, fourteen local performers, including twelve students, would go out “shooting”, identifying people, photographing them according to a formal protocol, but in very varied circumstances, and as amateurs. Many thousands of negatives were developed by the technical service at the Centre Pompidou. The tracking shot of the journey itself, of five minutes duration in either direction, was produced very professionally, with the camera mounted on an arm substantially above any parked cars. I made the chronophotographs describing the 120 descents from the bus myself, in one day, as an exhibition curator might take care of the wires that attach frames to a picture rail. Once the images were calibrated and the disk pressed, a small company called Imedia, who did research for the Direction Générale des Télécommunication, and were thus linked to the public sector, programmed the control of the piece, using completely new techniques, including those for the overlaying of text in the screens.

## Inclusion in the Exhibition

When, in the fall of 1983, Jean-François Lyotard became the commissioner, naming it *Les Immatériaux* and, in an unprecedented operation, shifting its emphasis toward philosophy, the exhibition in preparation – he preferred to call it a “*manifestation*” – would conserve its essential constitutive elements. Lyotard’s approach would be to bring together many different players along with their specialisms, to listen to them, to integrate them, and to allow them a considerable freedom, because the concrete content, that which would be exhibited, would ultimately come from them. Setting out from the rich material thus identified, his conception of the exhibition would become more dense and took shape rapidly. Conversely, he would sometimes produce rather mundane illustrations.

If the exhibition is multiple, difficult to make out, then it succeeds in its primary aim of showing the difficulty of communication, as opposed to a certain modernist idea of “transparency”. This is a proposition for the transformation of the exhibition genre itself. It refuses the model, “inherited from the eighteenth century”, of the “story” that one follows from room to room, just as much as it refuses the alternative model (very much in vogue at the time) of a spectacle-exhibition that would absorb the visitor. It takes a radically unprecedented form: there are no picture rails, no partitions, but instead frames, grilles, with everything suspended from the ceiling. It is a kind of labyrinth, “a maze of situations organized by questions” wherein one cannot really go astray, but may very quickly get the feeling that one may never get

out. “The Garden of Forking Paths”, “The Library of Babel” – references to Borges are numerous in Lyotard’s project, and in the propositions of the architect Philippe Délis. The space fabricated may be that of a nocturnal garden, with lines of force, nooks and crannies, a few impasses and, in spite of it all, some perspectives. In *Les Immatériaux*, the visitor firstly sees an envelope, relations of closeness and depth, of interior and exterior, of transparency and opacity, of abstraction and legibility. There is a plan, a conceptual and linguistic matrix, but there is no path traced out in advance – the route must remain aleatory, and its plotting falls to each visitor. Sound, by immersing visitors in an enigmatic textual universe, deliberately prevents all communication between them: “Solitude is the price to be paid for complexity”, as Lyotard says.

It has been suggested that Lyotard’s work was first of all, and very powerfully, that of an editor. *Le Bus*, while it was being made, would find its place within the axis “Content” (*Matière*). A content which does not refer outside of itself, which is inexhaustible. This idea of a critical mass, associated with the database, was for me at the time an essential aesthetic motivation.

It would find an echo in the very nature of *Les Immatériaux*. The notion of interactivity – a new notion which began to appear in dictionaries in 1980 – would also be diffused throughout the exhibition. Being involved with the work of Thierry Chaput and Philippe Délis, I followed the rising fortunes of this term, which they made into a guiding principle. Lyotard accepted it and took it up on his own account. For the exhibition sought to be neither encyclopaedic nor artistic. It sought to be a “work of art”, a “constellation of images-objects, poetic and literary”, an “opera”. It would thus have a dramaturgy that would be explicitly designated as an “interactive dramaturgy”.<sup>7</sup>

## What Happened Next

*Le Bus* would not have been made were it not for its inclusion in *Les Immatériaux*, and it proved to fit in well with the global concept constructed by Lyotard. The singular nature of the exhibition made possible works that had no claim to belong to contemporary art, even if they contributed something to it, whether in the field of image, text, sound, or – even more so – that of digital media. In both its modest dimensions and its aesthetics, our videodisc was significantly different from *Aspen Moviemap*, which demanded a great deal of work on Michael Naimark’s part to draw out its artistic valence, including the revelation of its hidden dimension of “micro-documentaries” descended from

7 Jean-Louis Boissier, “La question des nouveaux medias numériques”, in Bernadette Dufrene (ed.), *Centre Pompidou: 30 ans d’histoire* (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2007), p. 374–391.

cinéma vérité, under the influence of Richard Leacock.<sup>8</sup> Incidentally, Michael Naimark would be involved in 1985 in a prototype ordered by the Paris metro company RATP, which in the end was never taken forward.

In parallel with the design and realisation of *Le Bus*, during 1983–1985, and under the influence of this process, with the help of researchers and technicians at Paris 8, I made several videodisc essays: a walk on the north-south axis of Beijing in April 1983; a herbarium after Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1984–1985; and, above all, *Pékin pour mémoire* (*Peking for the Record*), an installation presented as an artwork, reproducing the performance of shooting around Beijing in 1985, according to a geometrical itinerary and a fixed temporality. It would be shown at the 1986 Venice Biennial, but under an “Arts and Science” banner, in the section “Technology and Information” directed by Roy Ascott.

In 1988 I used the formula “dramaturgy of interactivity” as the title of a manifesto text, where I argued for “an aesthetics of the impossible”.<sup>9</sup> In the same year, I made my first experiment for a Macintosh, with images made only of black and white pixels, organised with the software HyperCard: the installation *Album sans fin* (*Endless Album*). It was exactly along the lines of *Le Bus* and *Les Immatériaux*, since it explored the rapprochement, if not the hybridization, of reading and spectacle, of book and cinema: how to place a filmic substrate into the pages of a book. My later research, such as the *Flora Petrinsularis* installation and CD-Rom produced by the ZKM<sup>10</sup> would be largely devoted to this question, a formal and technological stake as much as a cultural and artistic investigation.

This way of not deciding on whether or not the work belonged to the artistic field would again be my approach in *Anthologie d'images de synthèse scientifiques* (*Anthology of Images of Scientific Syntheses*), my videodisc for *Passages de l'image*, at the Centre Pompidou in 1990 – alongside pieces by Dan Graham and Bill Viola that were incontestably artworks, by way of works by Michael Snow and Chris Marker. And again for the *Revue virtuelle*, which I designed from 1991–1997, still at the Centre Pompidou, and whose mission was to bring to light the aesthetic potential of the digital.

8 Michael Naimark, “Aspen the Verb: Musings on Heritage and Virtuality”, 2006. Online: <http://www.naimark.net/writing/aspen.html>.

9 Jean-Louis Boissier, “Dramaturgie de l’interactivité”, in *La Relation comme forme* (Geneva: Mamco, 2009), p. 22–29.

10 Jean-Louis Boissier, “Deux manières de faire des livres”, *artintact 1* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 1994).

## The Problematic

In the context of the tension produced by the “digital revolution” that was announcing itself – unless the change of paradigm had already taken place and it was a matter of adapting everything to it – Lyotard was asked about interactivity, in the very year of *Les Immatériaux*, in the seminar “Art and communication”. He declared that, as far as the reception of artworks was concerned: “the demand for an activity or ‘interactivity’ ... proves that there should be more intervention, and that we are thus through with aesthetic feeling.” Faced with the futile dilemma between passive and active, he advocates the *passible*. He denounces “the retreat of the passibility by which alone we are fit to receive and, as a result, to modify and do, and perhaps even to enjoy”.<sup>11</sup> Such a passibility is necessary in order for us to recognize a work of *art*. “Interactional ideology” is the very opposite of this.

For some years now, I have kept a black book – but one with a pink cover – where I note down what seem to me to be symptoms of what I call the “ideology of interactivity”. In it we find seemingly simple phrases such as “At every moment, the viewer is free to ...”. Without holding to Lyotard’s nostalgic refusal, but sharing his suspicion, I have tried to develop a practice of interactive works that would make them passible – that is to say, a practice that would be concretely designed for us (for you).

Translated from the French by Robin Mackay.

11 Jean-François Lyotard, “Something like: Communication... Without Communication,” in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. G. Bennington (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 117.





# Contemporary Art as "Immatériaux": Yesterday and Today

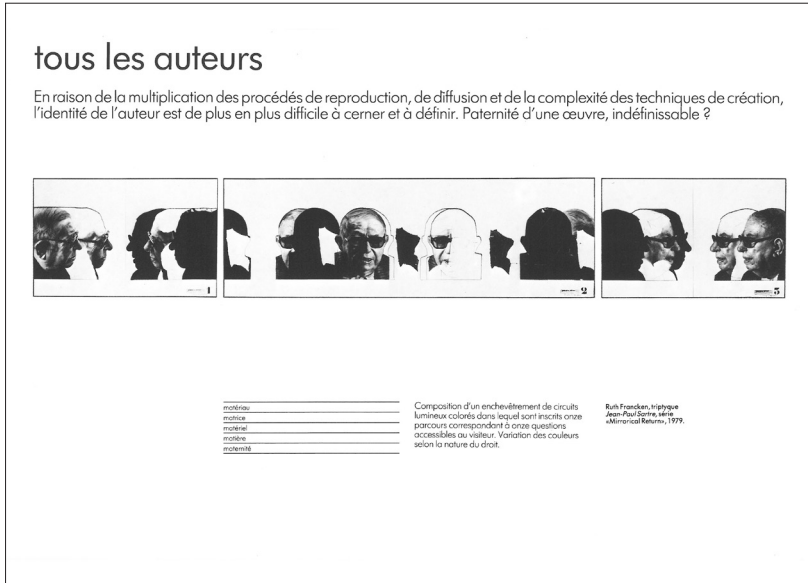
Francesca Gallo

In 1985 as today, the historical and critical interest of *Les Immatériaux* lies, in my opinion, in the way it opposed the trend towards the triumph of traditional values that marked the 1980s. This was a decade in which, in both the political and cultural arenas, the Western world witnessed the gradual advance and dominance of conservative positions, with the great success of a return to the various forms of painting: Transavanguardia, Neue Wilde, New Expressionism, and so on. *Les Immatériaux* should be understood as a kind of "Manifesto of Technophilic Postmodernism", of which Jean-François Lyotard was an interpreter.

While Lyotard left his stamp on *Les Immatériaux* especially through the work he did on the exhibition as a medium – the organization and display, the soundtrack, the catalogue, etc., are the very areas in which one can sense the hand of the philosopher<sup>1</sup> –, for the selection of the works, Lyotard often relied on specialists (such as Alain Sayag for the photography, or Bernard Blistène for fine arts). Indeed, after studying the documents in the archives of the Centre Pompidou,<sup>2</sup> one can understand that the collaboration with the National Museum of Modern Art (the art department of the Centre Pompidou,

1 Cf. Rosalind Krauss, "Le musée sans mur du postmodernisme", *Cahiers du MNAM*, no. 17–18 (1986): 152–158; Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (eds), *Thinking about Exhibition* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996); Jean Davallon, *L'exposition à l'oeuvre* (Harmattan: Paris, 2000).

2 I dedicated my PhD to *Les Immatériaux* and Lyotard's interest in contemporary art. See Francesca Gallo, *Les Immatériaux. Un percorso di Jean-François Lyotard nell'arte contemporanea* (Rome: Aracne, 2008); "Ce n'est pas une exposition, mais une oeuvre d'art: l'exemple de *Les Immatériaux* de Jean-François Lyotard," *Revue Appareil* (online), Varia, Articles, November 3, 2009, <http://revues.mshparisnord.org/appareil/index.php?id=860>.



[Figure 11] Ruth Francken: *Jean-Paul Sartre*, 1979. *Inventaire*, site *Tous les auteurs*, recto (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

MNAM) wasn't easy. For example, Lyotard did little to secure loans from other museums, an exception being the Egyptian bas-relief of the Grenoble Museum<sup>3</sup> – a strange choice, if truth be known. Despite this, the choice of artworks exhibited in *Les Immatériaux* is very stimulating, and gives rise to many lines of thought, even though the works represent only a part of the materials, documents, artefacts, instruments and images that filled the 60 sites on the fifth floor of the Centre Pompidou.

## Unstable Photographic Identities

I will concentrate on different types of works by artists who were alive at that time, in order to demonstrate the idea of postmodern art that Lyotard valued. Let us start with photography (by which I mean works of art made with a camera), among which those by Annegret Soltau, Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, and Ruth Francken, are the most representative.

Ruth Francken is one of the few artists included in *Les Immatériaux* whose work Lyotard knew personally. Indeed, he wrote a long essay about her entitled *L'Histoire de Ruth*, which was published as a short monograph in 1983. Francken concentrates on photographic portraits using *découpages* to replace faces with drawings, or silhouettes made of corrugated cardboard and parts of

3 Archives Centre Pompidou, deposit 1994033, b. 668, fasc. *Compte-rendus et réunions*.



[Figure 12] Exhibition view, site *L'Ange* (site design by Martine Moinot): Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, *Orlando-Hermaphrodite II* (Source: Klonaris/Thomadaki).

other photographs, bits of broken mirrors and so on. It's a process which calls into question the reliability of photographs as a means of documentation, following the footprints of Surrealism. The triptych *Jean-Paul Sartre*, 1979 (from the series *Mirrorical Return*), is reproduced on the page of *L'Inventaire* dedicated to the site *Tous les auteurs* [Figure 11]. The position of this work, far from being random, uses its power to challenge the supposed objectivity of the portrait, be it photographic or drawn. This aspect is made even more explicit by the choice of work on public figures (among which are Jean Tinguely, Yannis Xenakis, Samuel Beckett, John Cage, Joseph Beuys, and Lyotard himself). The philosopher sees in this *modus operandi* a proof of the conception of a multiple identity: these portraits contain within them a type of implied otherness of the subject.<sup>4</sup>

The same applies to another photography work, this time by Maria Klonaris and Katharina Thomadaki – *Orlando-Hermaphrodite II* (1983, 15 black-and-white photographs) – which is located on the site *L'Ange*. This work superimposes self-portraits of the two artists, and is inspired by *Orlando* and *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf [Figures 12, 13]. On the same site one can find images taken

4 Jean-François Lyotard and Ruth Francken, *L'Histoire de Ruth* (Paris: Le Castor Astral, 1983), p. 9–65; the same writing is also in the exhibition catalogue of *L'Histoire de Ruth*, an exhibition first shown at the Parisian gallery J. & J. Donguy, and afterwards travelling in Germany in 1986–87.

from the two artists' *Mistère I: Hermaphrodite endormi/e* (1982), which show the well-known Greek statue.

Klonaris and Thomadaki started a new cycle of works in 1985, dedicated to *L'Ange*, in which inter-sexuality and inter-media are joined. Their research is very complex from the point of view of the media used (film, photography, multi-media installations, video, holograms and digital images), at the centre of which there is, however, a cohesive set of themes related to the body and sexual gender. The focus on these issues defined the artistic nucleus of the 1970s, when efforts in the field of the expanded cinema coincided with the feminist position.<sup>5</sup>

At the site *L'Ange, Schwanger (Pregnant)*, a work by Annegret Soltau, can also be seen.<sup>6</sup> The German artist has focused – from the late '70s until today – on the themes of motherhood and female identity, often using her own body, as for example in *Schwanger*: a mosaic of photographs which documents her pregnancy, following the transformation of the physical appearance of the woman's body [Figure 14]. *Schwanger* consists of front and profile shots, in successive stages, and culminates with the explosion of the reassuring shape of the pregnant body in a blurry image of light and shadow on the film. Formalizing the union between birth and death, formation and deformation, defined and undefined, the sequence of the shots makes this classic and reassuring theme of motherhood disturbing; it overturns the traditional iconography and harks back to the feminist demands and the threats that progress in science and technology poses to the individual and the physical body.

Taken together, these three cases are emblematic of the attention that *Les Immatériaux* dedicated to identity, and to the transformation which this idea has suffered due to advances in science and technology such as plastic surgery, genetic engineering, robotics, and more recently the web, which is just the latest challenge to arrive. It is also worth mentioning that the deconstruction of the concept of identity is one of the most prominent themes of anti-metaphysics, of which Lyotard and Jacques Derrida were defenders. Deconstruction is a method that is anti-systemic, anti-authoritarian and anti-homogenizing, and is fully in line with the type of postmodernism of which Lyotard was an interpreter.

Looking at our present time, certain themes beloved by Lyotard are still topical. For example, the game of identity has become one of the most widespread pastimes among web users: social networks, blogs, chatrooms and dating portals have fuelled the fashion of self-presentation and *representation*,

5 Cf. Maria Klonaris, Katerina Thomadaki, exhibition catalogue (Paris: ASTARTI, 1985); Sandra Lischi, *Visioni elettroniche* (Rome: Marsilio, 2001), p. 109–110; and the artists' web site: <http://www.klonaris-thomadaki.net>.

6 The photographic reproduction of *Schwanger* is to be found in the *Inventaire*, on the page dedicated to the site *Les trois mères*.



[Figure 13] Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki: *Orlando-Hermaphrodite II* (Source: Klonaris/ Thomadaki).

backed by the great pressure of television. Anna Helmond has explored the link between search engines, social networks and identity constructions, showing how software and works associated with these web tools – as “Identity 2.0” – are a variant of a performative notion of identity, once again

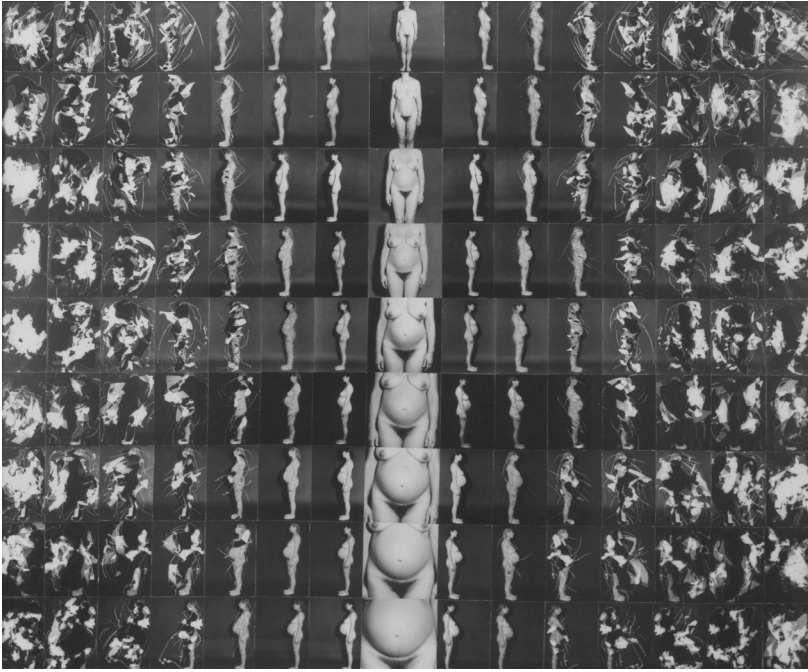
elaborated within postmodernism. Such forms of self-representation are more dynamic than static personal webpages, because they make possible the storage of documents related to the flow of personal and professional life. But the fact that they are often produced with an API (Application Programming Interface) causes a substantial seriality of personal profiles, documented in the various social networks. The relationship between self-determination and over-determination of identity is variable, but forms and contents automatically selected by software seem to prevail.<sup>7</sup>

Among female artists like Orlan, Cindy Sherman, Adrian Piper, and so on, Lynn Herschman, a pioneer of new-media art who has explored gender stereotypes in her famous alter ego *Roberta Beirtmore* (1974–78) – a work with a strong photographic part –, alludes precisely to mixture, where the percentage of stereotype prevails over personal identity. I am referring to *DiNA* (2004), an artificially intelligent agent, linked to the Internet and equipped with a custom software, video, and microphone, which makes her able to directly interact with the museum visitor [Figure 15]. *DiNA* is engaged in an ongoing campaign, via her website, for virtual elections to the office of TV-president; she converses with voters and collects votes on topics pertinent to global survival. *DiNA* is unique because she is able to process these responses in real time, and to mix virtual events which have occurred during her campaign with current events as they are unfolding throughout the world. Lynn Herschman writes about this work: “I’ve always been attracted to digital tools and cinematic metaphors that reflect our times, such as privacy in an era of surveillance, personal identity in a time of pervasive manipulations.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Postmodern Painting

In *Les Immatériaux* there were, of course, some examples of paintings. On this matter Paul Crowther has pointed out that the lack of the type of painting that was most popular at that time – New Expressionism, for example – showed that the selection used by Lyotard was guided by modernist criteria which, from the starting point of the historical avant-garde, led inevitably to conceptual art.<sup>9</sup> This is an interesting perspective, that, in my opinion, reiterates the fact that Lyotard is an interpreter of a postmodernism which is technophilic and post-structural rather than nostalgic and conservative.<sup>10</sup>

- 7 Cf. Anne Helmond, “Lifetracing. The Traces of a Networked Life”, in *Networked. A Networked Book about Networked Art*, 2009, <http://networkedbook.org>; Jay D. Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation. Understanding New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999).
- 8 Lynn Herschman Leeson, in *The Art and Film of Lynn Herschman Leeson. Secret Agent, Private I*, ed. Meredith Tromble (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- 9 Cf. Paul Crowther, *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996, 1st ed. 1993).
- 10 Cf. Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays in Postmodern Culture* (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983); Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York:



[Figure 14] Annegret Soltau: *Schwanger*, 1978–80, site *Trois mères* (Source: Annegret Soltau, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015).

Even among the painters featured in the exhibition, one finds artists who Lyotard followed closely, like Jacques Monory. The site *Peintre sans corps*, in fact, is entirely occupied by *Explosion* (1973), a set of four diptychs (one painting and three photographic print canvases) depicting, from a close vantage point, the explosion of an aeroplane landing on a runway. In the sequence of canvases, the image fades and grows dim, eventually becoming barely discernible, as if it had been washed away. The title of the site (*Peintre sans corps* or "Painter without body") alludes to the choice by Monory, as well as other hyper-realist painters, to suppress the gesture of painting in favour of the photographic print, a "mechanical" procedure. But the feeling when standing in front of the canvases is that painting itself was deprived of its body – i.e. the sensual aspect, the colour. This is one of the sites where the basic assumptions of a work of art, such as its physical aspects and its procedures, are challenged by the methods of the artist, following a sense of immateriality. Lyotard, at the time, had just dedicated to Monory a highly complex text, the *Assassinat de l'expérience de la peinture* (1984), consisting of two essays – the first written in



the '70s, the second at the beginning of the '80s<sup>11</sup> – which, taken together, document the transition from a mindset based in psychoanalysis and Marxism, in which the forms of artistic production are reflected in the forms of economic production, to the aesthetics of the sublime applied to contemporary art. Monory – a dispassionate painter who portrays the environments of the “jet set” and fashionable interiors – has become famous for polyptychs dedicated to violent events, in which he painted the scene of a crime or its protagonists, without sentiment, almost like a photojournalist.

In these paintings, the image is often repeated, as if it were the frame of a film, or a sequence of photographs; an impression which is also accentuated by the serial nature of the composition, obtained by the use of adjacent panels. At the same time, the scenes are often displayed inside monitors, mirrors, glass and windows, as if to confirm the role of the photographic framing as a visual mediation, one that is artificial and mechanical. It is for this reason that Lyotard proposes an implicit comparison between the photochemical and electronic visual devices, and the reproduction of the image, on the one hand, and the techniques and themes of the contemporary painter on the other.<sup>12</sup>

In *Ciels, nébuleuses et galaxies* (1978–81) Monory, instead, reproduces images of the starry sky without any “poetry”, because they were taken from recordings of radio telescopes: the primary source of the painter is stored numerical data transformed into images by software.

The reference to an “impersonal” iconography, such as radio telescopes or illustrated magazines, and the use of a mechanical technique, presupposes, of course, an anonymous observer: the sources and methods are diluted by the ubiquitous mass media; and, paradoxically, the realism of the scenes painted by Monory coincides with them being “recognizable” as images that belong to the universe of fashion, industrial production, scientific documentation, and the illustrated story of televisual communication.

Lyotard takes the inadequacy of the aesthetic category of beauty in contemporary art as widely understood and, in the case of Monory, he explains that Monory's painting “*does not solicit taste, in the Kantian sense of a disinterested sentiment that claims universality and, in doing so, appeals to a sensible community in agreement with itself as to what should be felt.*”<sup>13</sup> Monory's paintings are postmodern – continues Lyotard – because they have achieved the synthesis of the infinite (sublime) and finite (beautiful).<sup>14</sup> This text of 1981 is the first occasion in which Lyotard applies the concept of the sublime to contem-

11 Jean-François Lyotard, *L'Assassinat de l'expérience par la peinture, Monory* (Paris: Le Castor astral, 1984).

12 Ibid.

13 Jean-François Lyotard, “Esthétique sublime du tuer à gages”, in *L'Assassinat de l'expérience par la peinture, Monory*, p. 144–145.

14 Ibid., p. 145–154.



[Figure 15] Lynn Hershman: *DiNA*, 2004 (Source: Lynn Hershman).

porary art:<sup>15</sup> a connection that is mainly based on the fact that the painter, by choosing to paint images which use media as their primary source, brings into play technical reproduction.

## Ways of Interaction in Art

However, it is certainly not painting which draws the most attention in the exhibition curated by Lyotard, but rather – as I pointed out at the beginning – the presence of works of new-media art, and in particular of some interactive

15 In the same years appeared the following texts by Lyotard: *La pittura del segreto nell'epoca postmoderna*, Baruchello (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1982); *Rappresentazione, presentazione, impresentabile* (1982), now in *L'Inumano* (Milan: Lanfranchi, 2001, ed. orig. Paris, 1988), p. 159–170; *Il sublime e l'avanguardia* (1983), now in *ibid.*, p. 123–144; *L'istante, Newman* (1984), now in *ibid.*, p. 109–122; cf. Francesca Gallo, "Lyotard fra estetica, arte e critica d'arte. Forme di resistenza e modi di decostruzione", *Annali di critica d'arte*, no. 2 (2006), p. 637–660.

installations and works of computer art, which are novel – bearing in mind the aesthetic predilections of the philosopher, who usually paid more attention to painters.

Many of those who knew Lyotard remember his curiosity and enthusiastic interest in new technological devices: stories which we can well believe when we see pictures of Lyotard using the headphones that carry the soundtrack of the exhibition [Figure 16]. The headphones were one of the ideas that the philosopher-curator was most proud of, and for which he explicitly took credit.<sup>16</sup>

Returning to the selection of the works of new-media art, it seems to me that this is the terrain on which Lyotard had the strongest confrontations with the other lecturers from the University of Paris VIII. Jean-Louis Boissier remembered his extensive collaboration on *Les Immatériaux*: Boissier's work *Le Bus* is one of the iconic works of the exhibition, particularly because of the exploration of urban space that it proposes, which in some ways recalls the Situationist practice of urban drifting<sup>17</sup> [Figure 9]. The latter, in turn, is a fitting model for the visit to *Les Immatériaux*: that is, to stroll, with no points of orientation, being able to keep crossing the same sites, and observe objects of a different nature, such as those that the Situationists observed in the shop windows and in the streets of Paris.

Disorientation is perhaps the most ubiquitous element in *Les Immatériaux*, and the image which best illustrates the "confusion" experienced during a visit to the exhibition was, perhaps, the catalogue, which was made up of a hundred loose sheets (not bound in a book) – much as the individual sites were not included in a pre-planned, sequential or narrative-driven route of the exhibition. The architect Philippe Délis has underlined how the spatial conception of the exhibition – which at the time was novel – has become familiar to us during the last 20 years, mainly thanks to the experience of surfing the net.<sup>18</sup>

16 The headphones were tuned to various soundtracks which were present in some areas of the exhibition. During the visit one could listen to different emissions/programmes – just like a car radio which passes from one station to another during a journey. In this case, the relationship between the soundtrack and the visual images was complex in nature and echoed the method Lyotard had used in various videos in the '70s and '80s: in both cases he made extensive use of being out of sync, as the quintessence of the anti-narrative.

17 Cf. Jean-Louis Boissier, *La relation comme forme. L'interactivité en art* (Genève: MAMCO, 2004); F. Gallo, "Le Bus di Jean-Louis Boissier: esplorazione vs deriva", *Materiali di Estetica*, n.s., n. 1 (2010): 322–329.

18 Cf. Phillipe Délis, *Les Immatériaux*, speech at round table *L'Hyper matériel/l'immatériel, le paradoxe de l'usage des matières*, international congress *L'œuvre plus que jamais* (Institut Français de Casablanca, April 2005), now in [www.integral-philippedelis.com](http://www.integral-philippedelis.com); *Architecture: l'espace-temps autrement...*, in E. Théofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et après? "Les Immatériaux"* (Paris: Édition Autrement, 1985).



[Figure 16] Jean-François Lyotard during the opening of *Les Immatériaux*, 26 March 1985 (from left to right: Claude Pompidou, Thierry Chaput, Jean-François Lyotard, Jack Lang) (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, photograph by Jean-Claude Planchet).

But returning to the interactive art of *Les Immatériaux*, as well as *Le Bus*, there is *Son=Espace*, created *ad hoc* by Rolf Gehlhaar [Figure 17]. Technically advanced, the work was indebted to research in visual kinetics. *Son=Espace* comprised a space which viewers walked through, with sensors that picked up the movements of the audience and turned them into sounds by means of an elaborate computerized system devised by the artist. This project was born from the idea of creating a piece of music that was non-deterministic, and in fact Gehlhaar had been working since 1983 on developing an adequate software program, work which also gave rise to the title of the work. The movements of the user were detected by a sensor system using ultrasonic devices, which sent them to the software. The software produced different sounds, depending on the areas in which the public was located, on the speed and direction of the movement, and so on. The work consisted of the software developed by the artist which, among other things, he has continued to work on since, creating different variations of the prototype exhibited at the Centre Pompidou<sup>19</sup> thanks to the committee of La Villette, the museum of science and technique that opened in 1986, and for which *Les Immatériaux* was, from the point of view of institutional policy, a sort of dress rehearsal.

But what are Lyotard's ideas about these works of art? Can one consider "interactivity" as being equivalent, in the arts, to the theme of "the crisis of the subject" in philosophy?

19 See Rolf Gehlhaar, *Sound=Space*, <http://www.gehlhaar.org>.

In the early 1980s, Lyotard argued that “experience” is a modern concept, which is possible when the following conditions are present: 1) there is a subject (ego); 2) there is a dimension of time articulated by past-present-future; and 3) the idea that the world, and the objects which compose it, are objects of the alienation of the subject itself, which is a necessary step to ensure that the subject goes dialectically back to itself, according to Hegel’s philosophy. The expansion of the “technical science-based capitalist” since the nineteenth century, however, has suppressed these basic points of reference, implying that the ego, and the linear concept of time that produces experience, do not exist, and that the world has no need for alienation – that is, for the objectification of the subject that is necessary for it to understand itself.<sup>20</sup> In a nutshell, you could say that we are facing the prelude to the “crisis of the subject” that is one of the themes of contemporary thought, running parallel to the “crisis of objectivity”, or the crisis of the existence of the traditional concept of truth as a matter of correspondence between subject and object.<sup>21</sup>

The epistemological and aesthetic legitimacy of plural narratives and truth, therefore, is reflected in the redefinition of the role of the author. According to Lyotard, the author may appear in a different guise than that which is defined by a form;<sup>22</sup> while, at the same time, modern day social communication leads to a rejection of space for contemplation, in favour of the “active” spectator, who meets the “proposing” author halfway, in a type of dialogue in which the two roles merge and become confused.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Lyotard shares the premise of the “death of the author” proposed by Roland Barthes in 1968, according to which it is the reader who takes responsibility for the construction of meaning.

However, despite these premises, Lyotard is not at all convinced that interactivity with a work of art is a transfer of theory from a linguistic game to the artistic field. This is primarily because art cannot be equated with a move in a game: if anything, communication can be equated to a move in a game. Art is a creative move that experiments, that rewrites the rules of the game while playing. Therefore, when art is combined with new technology, according to Lyotard, art can not simply change its form to adopt that of new technologies. The specific point of the artistic experience remains in the realm of emotion and sensitivity; Lyotard uses a term that is difficult to translate: “*passibilité*”,<sup>24</sup>

20 Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, “L’Expertise”, in *L’Assassinat de l’expérience par la peinture, Monory*, p. 7–10.

21 Cf. H. Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern. A History* (London-New York: Routledge, 1995); R. Ceserani, *Raccontare il postmoderno* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1997); D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass./Oxford: Routledge, 1990).

22 Jean-François Lyotard, “Qualcosa come: ‘comunicazione... senza comunicazione asdf’”, in *L’Inumano*, p. 156.

23 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 156–157.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 155–156.



[Figure 17] Rolf Gehlhaar, *Son = Espace*, 1983-85, installation view, site *Musicien malgré lui* (Source: Rolf Gehlhaar).

which is not only the opposite of impassivity, but also the condition by which we welcome, we receive, as when we are touched by something else without knowing what it is – or, in Kantian terms, without any intellectual intervention.

It is difficult to say whether the philosopher of postmodernism would have appreciated a new kind of artwork, made with data flows on the web – one of the newest forms of interaction. Carlo Zanni, an Italian artist who lives in Milan and New York, combines technical research with high-level stylistic solutions, while also integrating suggestions from literary texts and soundtracks.

From *Ebay Landscape* (2004) – where the form of a simple Japanese landscape changes constantly following the NASDAQ, the stock market of *Ebay*, and the CNN home page – to *In time* (2005) – a skyline where the weather changes every 15 minutes according to the meteorological station at La Guardia Airport, while the choppers and zeppelins follow the updates of CNN website, and the skyline is like a dynamic histogram related with the most frequent queries on the *Time Out New York* website<sup>25</sup> – Zanni explores a sort of interaction without personal intentions.

The fluid and unstable nature of these works is evidently a metaphor for our increasingly connected world. In the same direction, Zanni works on "data cinema", which is what he calls a kind of work in which the constant changing of the web – with which the user interacts via his or her Internet connection – modifies the novel. *The Possible Ties Between Illness and Success* (2006) is a

25 See <http://www.zanni.org>.



[Figure 18] Carlo Zanni, *The Fifth Day*, 2009 (still of the web work) (Source: Carlo Zanni).

reflection upon the relationship between talent, success and manic-depressive illness. We observe the protagonist of a short film attacked by a progressive disease. The spots that slowly cover his body, like a contagious disease, are generated automatically by software that communicates with Google Analytics, a well-known statistical analysis system for monitoring the traffic on websites: "The patches extend as much as the virtual visitors increase, and distribute on the actor's body in different places, depending on the geographical origin of the visitors. The film is constantly changing, due to the interaction of the unaware spectators."<sup>26</sup>

Another work by Zanni embodies early analysis of digital photography, as proposed by Edmond Couchot more than fifteen years before.<sup>27</sup> *The Fifth Day* (2009) is a sequence of pictures showing a taxi ride. The photos were taken in Alexandria (Egypt). They change during the exhibition, because linked to the web, being thereby sensitive to the dataflow from Egypt, describing the evolution of statistics of some aspects of its cultural and political life. The data, retrieved from the Internet and transforming the aesthetics of the photos, relate to such matters as the proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament (which changes the position of the pedestrian crossing the road in one photo), or the perception of corruption (which changes the image in the rear-view mirror of the taxi in another photo),<sup>28</sup> to name just two [Figure 18].

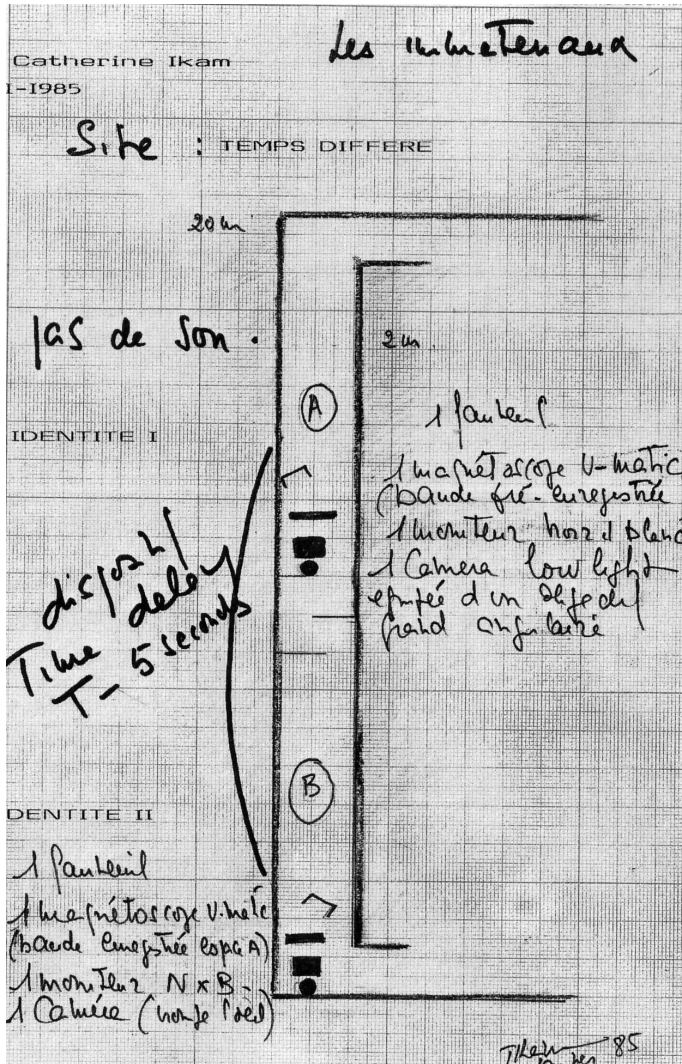
So, in the end, in my opinion, works of art based on the Internet are the clearest examples of how *Les Immatériaux* was on the right track, in the middle of the 1980s.

26 Valentina Tanni, "Il cinema ha un nuovo DNA", *Exibart.onpaper*, no. 47 (2008); "Maps and Legends. When Photography Met the Web", in *Fotografia 2010. Futurespective*, exhibition catalogue (Rome: Macro, 2010).

27 Cf. Edmond Couchot, "La synthèse numérique de l'image: vers un nouvel ordre visuel", *Traverses*, no. 26 (1982), p. 56–63; Edmont Couchat and Norbert Hillaire, *L'art numérique: comme la technologie vient au monde de l'art* (Paris: Flammarion, 2003).

28 See <http://www.zanni.org>.





[Figure 19] Catherine Ikam, installation sketch, site *Temps différé* (detail from *Inventaire*, site *Temps différé*, verso) (Source: Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).

Continuing our stroll through *Les Immatériaux*, looking for works of new-media art, we encounter a work that is almost “rudimentary” for its time, even when compared to *Le Bus* or *Son=Espace*, for example. I am talking about *Temps différé* (1985) by Catherine Ikam, a closed-circuit video installation identifiable with the site of the same name.

Originally linked to minimalist research on perception and its space-time dimension (an example being Bruce Nauman’s work), and subsequently



focusing on the social implications of video surveillance (different examples we can cite are the experiences of Fred Forest and Dan Graham), closed-circuit video installations are located in an intermediate position between video art and interactive environments.

The artwork of Ikam focuses in particular on the distorting effect that mirrors have on closed-circuit television [Figure 19]. *Temps différé* consists of two rooms, which are identical, empty and interconnected, equipped with a video surveillance system: a minimalist purity whose result is rather mundane. In the first room, the visitor sees on the monitor the place where he is standing, devoid of his own presence; in the second environment, however, the TV displays an image of the preceding space, recorded immediately before. In this way, the experience of the place and its image on the monitor do not match, as occurs in the classical *Corridors* of Bruce Nauman. The goal in both cases is to undermine the fidelity, realism and documentary ability of the video, and to simultaneously induce in the viewer a kind of cognitive vertigo, caused by the inconsistencies.<sup>29</sup>

I have long questioned why Lyotard chose such an outdated work, even if it was specially made for *Les Immatériaux*. Beyond any other considerations, I believe that the philosopher meant the selected artworks to serve as emblems, symbols of certain tendencies in contemporary society, and that he therefore sometimes glossed over the artistic value of some of the works. *Les Immatériaux* is a classic example of an educational exhibition – a theoretical exhibition if you like – rather than an object-oriented show. And this is also the reason why some works were displayed both at the 1983 exhibition *Electra: Electricity and Electronics in the Twentieth Century*,<sup>30</sup> and at *Les Immatériaux*, because they have a very different meaning and purpose in the two exhibitions.

In the case of *Temps différé*, it is probably the idea of using feedback, which is at the core of the artwork, that Lyotard found interesting: it is a concept that was borrowed from biology and psychology, and that has been applied to both social communication and the arts. Starting from the various forms of interactivity, passing through some examples of Institutional Critique, of Conceptual Art and Relational Art, the attention given to “feedback” is a typical aspect of late modern culture, and one of those concepts that mark the horizon of artistic research in the last 30 to 40 years, even if it changes its appearance.

Before concluding, some thoughts on one of the most challenging and perhaps the most successful spaces included in *Les Immatériaux* – at least

29 Cf. Catherine Ikam. *Dispositif pour un parcours video*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1980).

30 Cf. *Electra: l'électricité et l'électronique dans l'art du XX siècle*, exhibition catalogue curated by Frank Popper, Paris (Musée de la Ville), 1984; Katherine Dieckmann, “Electra Myths: Videos, Modernism, Postmodernism”, *Art Journal*, Fall (1985), p. 195–203.

according to the public at the time. I refer to the site *Labyrinthe du langage*, full of computer terminals where one could experience the first rudimentary forms of network connection through the network Minitel (the French ancestor of the web), and play with some examples of computer art which were extremely simple and graphics-based.

From a current perspective, it is *Epreuves d'écriture* that attracts our interest. Its relative failure – due both to the inadequacy of the computer equipment, and a lack of familiarity on the part of the intellectuals with this new form of writing and the idea of mutual cooperation – brings us to examine the instincts of the curatorial team and the importance of infrastructure in the form taken by an artwork. Today *Epreuves d'écriture* is a curious chronicle publication that includes the experience of specialists from different disciplines, called to deal with the new ways of online word processing, which was still full of technical problems. The book is obviously the wrong format for a work that should have continued to be produced in a digital format, like a hypertext (on a hard-drive memory, because the CD-ROM did not yet exist).

*Epreuves d'écriture* is located between the *Plissure du texte* (1983), which Roy Ascott created for the *Electra* exhibition, and the network organized also by Ascott for the laboratory *Ubiqua* at the Corderie dell'Arsenale at the 1986 Venice Biennial.<sup>31</sup> At *Les Immatériaux*, instead, Roy Ascott presented *Organ et fonction d'Alice au pays des merveilles*, in which, through Minitel, the inhabitants of the Île-de-France could intervene by altering the text from home, in a more anonymous and free way than in other, comparable works by Ascott:

Randomly selected quotations from a French translation of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* were juxtaposed with quotations from a scientific treatise entitled *Organe et fonction*, creating unexpected relationships and associations. Conventional notions of originality, authenticity, objecthood, narrative, and style were supplanted by appropriation, duplication, distribution, juxtaposition, and randomness.<sup>32</sup>

I agree with Edward Shanken's claims, not only in relation to the vitality of BBS (Bulletin Board System), local networks and blogs in the 1990s and the first decade of this century, but even today, when verbal communication and narration are still attractive for those who work with new-media art.

Translated from the Italian by Mary Desmond and Pasquale Polidori.

31 Cf. *XLII Esposizione internazionale d'arte. Arte e scienza*, exhibition catalogue (Venice: Marsilio, 1986): some artists who had participated in *Les Immatériaux* participated also in this edition of the Venice Biennale.

32 Edward A. Shanken, *From Cybernetics to Telematics: the Art, Pedagogy and Theory of Roy Ascott*, in R. Ascott, *Telematic Embrace*, ed. E.A. Shanken (Berkeley-London, 2007, 1st ed. 2003), p. 67.



# *Les Immatériaux:* An “Immodern” Project

Thierry Dufrêne

The preparatory papers of Jean-François Lyotard for the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, which can be consulted in the archives of the Centre Pompidou, constitute the sub-text of the final event. The philosopher reflected deeply upon the prefix *in-* (*im-*) which baptises the exhibition by a neologism: “the negation *im-* in ‘immaterials’ indicates the situation of a face-to-face, a confrontation that opposes the subject, the subject of will, of spirit, of the gaze, to that which is not him, and which falls under the general denomination *mât*. This face-to-face situation, then, is undermined today”<sup>1</sup> – undermined, indeed, to the point of suggesting a whole series of aliases, notions and related attitudes (“*immature*”, “*incréter*”, “*immortel*” etc.). Lyotard is aware of the existence of a paradox, and retains all of its critical and dialectical value: Is the project of *Les Immatériaux* really postmodern, even though in many ways it continues the modern project of knowledge and mastery of nature, such that we might rightfully wonder if the title of the exhibition does not hide another, which would be that of the “*immodern*”? – a neologism which Lyotard did not create, and that, from our perspective, has only the status of a working hypothesis.

The philosopher specified that, previously, a material was something natural that man transformed according to his purposes or projects. Today, on the one hand, a material which does not exist can be invented according to the

1 Archives Centre Pompidou, Exposition “Les Immatériaux”, Dossier 2009012; transcript from a recording of Jean-François Lyotard on two cassette tapes, which cannot currently be located. According to the beginning sentences, “Après six mois de travail en commun avec l’équipe du C.C.I. et à un an de l’ouverture de l’exposition intitulée *Les Immatériaux*”. It was probably produced in Spring 1984. The citation is from page 4, line 17 and onward, translation see this volume, p. 32.

project (material of synthesis); on the other, man is more and more conscious that he cannot have any more simple rational projects. Why? First, because he inherits from the past and cannot build on a *tabula rasa* (as the moderns had still hoped). Second, because the complexity of technoscience multiplies types of information, mediation and interaction (with machines, institutions), resulting in a decrease in the voluntary part of collective action (states, companies), and all the more that of the individual. And last, because the models of action and purpose that had been instituted during the Age of the Enlightenment showed the limits of anthropocentrism. Lyotard qualifies the new structure of creativity, in the field of industry as in that of art, as follows: “the principle upon which is built the operating structure is not one of a stable ‘substance’, but of an unstable set of interactions”.<sup>2</sup> The artificial intelligence of machines and the materials of synthesis decreased the difference between the human mind and things. This instability creates a concern, a concern which characterizes the postmodern condition.

But when we consider the actual exhibition, its catalogue, and the later papers of Lyotard, we can distinguish between Lyotard’s thought when he planned the exhibition and his thought as modified by it. This thought was undoubtedly postmodern in the preparatory stages: the ascendancy of the human subject is “weakened” in the term “*immatériaux*”, as it is generally the case in the postmodern condition (and Lyotard is happy with it)<sup>3</sup>. Yet, in our view, his thought later became “immodern”, since he considers that the idea “of general interaction strengthens” between man and non-human beings, the machines, the messages, the natural elements (we would add certainly today: animals), since man himself is not “the origin of messages, but sometimes the receiver, sometimes the referent, sometimes a code, sometimes a support for the message; and where sometimes he himself is the message”.<sup>4</sup> After the ontology of the subject (modernity) and its crisis (postmodernity), the ontology of the interaction (“immodernity”) opens. After the “sorrow”, the “melancholy”, which are the words which qualify the postmodern; the philosopher speaks then of his “gaiety” and even his “very big gaiety”.<sup>5</sup>

An art historian may justly consider *Les Immatériaux* as the first exhibition to have been held in Paris’s Centre Pompidou which considered contemporary art as part of a “global social fact”, to employ the expression of Marcel Mauss.

2 In a text titled “Les Immatériaux. Présentation” dated April 1984, p. 5. The “I” in the text can be ascribed with certitude to the philosopher. Archives Centre Pompidou, Exposition “Les Immatériaux”, Dossier 2009012.

3 Archives Centre Pompidou, Exposition “Les Immatériaux”, Dossier 2009012, transcript, p. 5, “the human subject becomes no longer a subject but, I would say... just one case among the many multiple interactions that constitute the universe”, in this volume, p. 33.

4 Ibid., p. 37.

5 Ibid., p. 36.

In his famous essay *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic societies* (1925), Mauss observed that those human transactions which appear the most free, such as acts of giving and receiving, are framed by obligations of reciprocity which constitute real social rules. The gift represents the donor as well as the relations between the donor and the recipient and beyond, their chalk-linings. In a comparable way, “immatériaux” according to Lyotard are, as already mentioned, an “unstable set of interactions”.<sup>6</sup>

Did Lyotard make the first postmodern (art) exhibition? Shall we say that contemporary artists (since the 1960s) are postmodern only because they did not believe they could enlighten the future of their societies any more, as the avant-gardes of modern art believed?

In the exhibition, we see them nevertheless fascinated by the deciphering of the present, which they do not define according to the past, as did the tradition, but from which they question both the past (origin) and the future (transformation). There also the hypothesis of “immodern art” can be formulated.

Lyotard is impassioned by Barnett Newman’s redefinition of the sublime: as Marx had done for Hegel, Newman put Kant and Burke back on their feet. The sublime is here and now. A Klein, a Fontana, are sublime; no backworld is necessary. And we are in the “Irreprésentable”, in the abstraction, which is only colour and rhythm. On the contrary, Larry Bell’s glass cube and François Morellet’s neon stole the light and presented it in its immanence, filtered by the glass or by the material “neon”. It is light which is at the same time matter (subject) and material (support). Simone Martini’s *Annunciation* (1333) in the exhibition can suggest the overtaking of the opposition between the

6 In *The Gift* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 26, Mauss insisted on the mixture of people and things. The gift is not only an object; it is the person who gives it and in a way remains in it and acts through it: “In short, this represents an intermingling. Souls are mixed with things; things with souls. Lives are mingled together, and this is how, among persons and things so intermingled, each emerges from their own sphere and mixes together. This is precisely what contract and exchange are”. And in the record of Lyotard’s talk presenting the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* in Spring 1984, *Après six mois de travail...*, the philosopher said: “we see a sort of reinforcement, an exaggeration almost, of the intimacy between the mind and things. For example, the software that is coming into general use on all scales is mind incorporated into matter; synthetic products, ... are matters that are a result of knowledge – they are instigated by the mind ...” (in this volume p. 32). Another link between Mauss and Lyotard is their method, that could be summarized in a “Tout parle” (anything speaks; anything means). In *The Gift* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 56, describing the houses of the Trobrianders, Mauss asserts: “Everything speaks – the roof, the fire, the carvings, the paintings – for the magical house is built”. In the talk just mentioned, Lyotard said: “Basically it will always be a question of asking: What does it speak of? How does it speak? What does it speak with? What speaks and what does it speak to? Presupposed in the very idea of modernity is the idea that everything speaks ...” (ibid., p. 31).

transcendence of the “irreprésentable” and the immanence of the “Stolen light” (Lumière dérobée).

“Immodern” is the *Annunciation*, in its anachronistic presence. The exhibition proposed the *anamnesis* of art. A new “In-” is outlined: “*Intemporel*” (timeless), a title that Malraux gave to the last book of his trilogy *The Metamorphosis of the Gods* in 1973. For Malraux, the last stage of the “Musée imaginaire” is the “museum of broadcasting”. And *The Metamorphosis of the Gods* had become in 1978 a documentary under the title *Métamorphoses du regard* made by Clovis Prévost. The transfer from book to film is essential in Malraux’s thinking. A similar transfer from book to an audiovisual media production such as the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, is conceived by Lyotard as a real fulfilment. Lyotard stressed that it was he who had the idea of including sound in *Les Immatériaux*: he even said that this was his real contribution.

The exhibition, but also its hidden images – those that were not used and are still in boxes,<sup>7</sup> potential – present breathtaking material: scientific images via the electron microscope, plans of drops of water and chromosome, radiologies, scanners and chromatographies. The underlying idea of a laboratory of cosmogenesis – of “1985: A Space and Time Odyssey”, in reference to Stanley Kubrick’s movie of 1968, *2001: A Space Odyssey* – appears in the numerous photographs of the sky, the spectographs of invisible stars, and the impressive audiovisual astrophysics device projected on a circumference of three metres in diameter in *Creusets stellaires* (*matière* site). But as in science fiction, the modern project is infused with a “sorrow”, a “melancholy”: it is a very sophisticated civilization, but at its end, it wonders about its origins. Already machines seem more human than man and sing songs before dying, as did the robot HAL 9000 in Kubrick’s movie. Man needs to be born again.

Modernism, according to Lyotard, is the history and the narrative of a robbery, of an interception: “all the messages were not intended for us, we steal them” (*matière* site). Man folded the world in his intention. Drawing is considered as the “mother of all the arts”: the exhibition shows that with the calculated images and the materials of synthesis; it is reality which is summoned to look like drawing (*Référence inversée*). Nevertheless, the artists are precisely those who stage a reality which escapes being kidnapped: in the impressive *Present continuous past(s)* (1974) by Dan Graham, the matter (subject) of time is infinitely divided in the mirrored image. Also, as Matisse had previously noticed, the immanence of colour always escapes the line drawn by the pencil.

Of all those who tried to define what an “art world”, an “art network” is (Michael Baxandall, 1972; Howard Becker, 1982; Raymonde Moulin, 1992), Lyotard is the only one to have individualized the “matrix” – the code, separating it clearly from the four other “mat”s: *matériau*, *matériel*, *matière* and

7 Archives Centre Pompidou, Exposition “Les Immatériaux”, Dossier 94033.

*maternité*. For Baxandall as for Becker, patrons and artists share maternity – if we transpose it into the terms of Lyotard – of works (materials) which deal with subjects according to the mental and sensitive equipment peculiar to a given period and culture. The code is fluid in the exchange: the matrix is transparent in the exchange. We can say that it's the same for the art anthropologist Alfred Gell when he represents the "network of art" (*Art Nexus*) in his book *Art and Agency* (1998): the relations reveal four fundamental terms: artist / index / prototype / recipient, which – except for the "recipient", who does not really have an equivalent in the five "*mat*", according to Lyotard – correspond to material / maternity / ... / material (subject), with two positions: active, passive (agent, patient). The reciprocity of the given orders (information) and the received orders operates in Gell's view as in an exchange between people (Mauss).

Only in Lyotard's view does the matrix (the code) exist independently of the people, and even threatens to escape them for ever. A set of rules, rolls, rations, uniforms takes towards the human being a distance equivalent to the one that the human being had taken towards nature by stealing all the messages. Could the same kidnapping be made at his expense? Could the inhuman – the machine – be able to take command?

Lyotard sometimes seems to lean towards a pessimistic vision of "immatériaux". Fourteen years after the exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, released only one year after the death of the philosopher in April 1998, the movie *Matrix* (1999) by the Wachowski brothers gave a global dimension to this pessimism. Not only machines became the executioners of human beings, but the matrix – the code, which gives its title to the movie – became a "system" of oppression. The movie postulates that any hybridization with machines, any artificial construction, any measure (*mâtram*) will inevitably turn against human beings. It activates a sort of "Neo-" symbolism ("Neo" is the name of the hero) related to Gothic revival or New Age revival. Nothing seems more distant from the thought of Lyotard, for whom the postmodern condition doesn't imply a return to the origin, but a return on the origin.

More optimistic, more critical, more articulate, the recent movie *Interstellar* (2014) by Christopher Nolan is thus ultimately more Lyotardian. Having crossed a black hole, the hero Cooper comes back from the future of space just behind the bookcase of his daughter Murph, and sends her a message. The bookcase reminds us of Borgès's library, which is a major reference of *Les Immatériaux*. In the fourth dimension (see Marcel Duchamp and Lyotard), Cooper can walk in an architecture whose galleries would be as many different moments in life. The bookcase is the interface between multiple interconnected spaces. Cooper implements (im)materials (prints, drawings in the dust, magnetic current), a matrix (Morse code), a material (books, watch), a maternity (he is the father who co-produces the equations with his daughter),



and a subject matter (the secret to boost life, to prevent everything from again turning into dust).

For that purpose, it has been necessary for him to go over to the other side: to pass through a wormhole opening onto other galaxies. This wormhole recalls the symbol of life given by the goddess to the Egyptian Pharaoh Nectanébo II in the Egyptian bas-relief of Karnak which opened the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* in the Centre Pompidou in 1985. This wormhole recalls the symbol of life given by the goddess to the Egyptian Pharaoh Nectanébo II in the Egyptian bas-relief of Karnak which opened the exhibition *Les Immatériaux* in the Centre Pompidou in 1985. The engraved stone stood at the entrance, and a stretched-out, staggered photographic reproduction was the last exhibit. The bas-relief reminds us of the monolith in Kubrick's 2001, *A Space Odyssey*. Like the monolith, it testifies to the human as being a "case". Lyotard indeed saw the human subject no longer as master, but "as a case of the multiple interactions which constitute the universe".

His vision joins that of Hannah Arendt, who in *Between Past and Future* (1961) asserted that works of art "are fabricated not for men, but for the world which is meant to outlast the life-span of mortals, the coming and going of the generations."<sup>8</sup>

That would be the "immodern" hypothesis.

8 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*. (New York: Viking, 1961), p. 210.





## **PART III: THEORY**



# The Shadow of the Sublime: On *Les Immatériaux*

Bernard Stiegler

A recent article by Vivek Chibber, “Capitalism, Class and Universalism”,<sup>1</sup> denounced the ideological devastation wrought by what, on the other side of the Atlantic, is referred to as poststructuralism, and by variations on this theme such as postcolonial studies. Chibber seems to see no virtue in the questions raised by those currents of French thought collectively described as poststructuralist – and this is a serious mistake.

But for those who, like me, affirm the necessity of continuing to examine the works of poststructuralism, an even greater mistake would consist in ignoring the questions raised by Chibber – or, in other words, to dismiss such questions.

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In relation to these questions, my own thesis – which I attempted to synthesize in *States of Shock* by proposing an “internal critique” of poststructuralism (“internal”, that is, a critique that proceeds by taking up as my own the expectations of poststructuralism, in order to analyse and overcome its limits, and in order to elaborate what I call a “new critique”) – is that what poststructuralism (which resembles and is often confused with postmodernism) has proven itself incapable of thinking is *technics*.<sup>2</sup>

1 Vivek Chibber, “Capitalism, Class and Universalism: Escaping the Cul-de-Sac of Postcolonial Theory,” *Socialist Register* 50 (2014), p. 63–79, available from the author at: [http://sociology.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/225/Capitalism\\_Class\\_and\\_Universalism.pdf](http://sociology.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/225/Capitalism_Class_and_Universalism.pdf). An abridged version appeared in the May 2014 edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

2 Bernard Stiegler, *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).

*Les Immatériaux* was presented to the public at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1985, and obviously formed a “discourse figure” about matter, and thus materialism, and a “discourse figure” that was perceived as a veritable “postmodern manifesto”. *Les Immatériaux*, then, did indeed give some thought to technics, and did so eloquently, but also mysteriously and tacitly – the technology of “language machines”<sup>3</sup> constituting a major indicator of “postmodernity”, as was already the case in *The Postmodern Condition*.<sup>4</sup> And Lyotard clearly apprehends these machines in terms of a *question of writing* – machines through which Lyotard was led to link writers together in an operation he called *Épreuves d’écriture* – and this was thus a prescient approach insofar as it foresaw that the *network* would soon be a major issue for “postmodernity”.

For reasons I explain at greater length in *States of Shock*, however, the question of technics that lies behind that of writing is not yet thought as such in *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>5</sup> This is not only because this exhibition does not have a didactic relation to its public, but because Lyotard sees the technical writing that he refers to as “telegraphy”, which is the writing of “development”, as being in opposition to anamnestic writing, which according to Lyotard would be what “resists” this development.

Furthermore, if the exhibition could not have been and should not have been didactic, this was because *Les Immatériaux* needed to grant access to the experience of what Lyotard called “*the figural*”, even though the problematic of *Discourse, Figure*<sup>6</sup> gives way here to the question of *bearing witness to a différend in reason* that goes beyond the modern, *Lyotard affirming this by bearing witness to it on the basis of Kant read through Wittgenstein*.

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It is on the basis of what at that time was referred to as the *linguistic turn* – an expression coined by Gustav Bergmann<sup>7</sup> and taken up by Lyotard on the back cover of *The Differend*<sup>8</sup> – that *Les Immatériaux* presented what, 30 years later, we ourselves instead understand as a *technological turn*.

*Les Immatériaux* was an exhibition conceived and presented in the context of what was then, in France, called *la télématique* – France being in those days

3 Jean-François Lyotard, “New Technologies”, *Political Writings*, trans. Bill Readings and Kevin Paul Geiman (London: UCL Press, 1993), p. 18.

4 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

5 See Stiegler, *States of Shock*, chap. 4.

6 Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

7 Gustav Bergmann, *Logic and Reality* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964).

8 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

ahead of its time in terms of digital technology, telematics having been developed through the Minitel and its messaging systems thanks to the political will reflected in the Minc and Nora report on *The Computerization of Society*,<sup>9</sup> already cited in *The Postmodern Condition* six years before *Les Immatériaux*. *The Differend* was published two years before *Les Immatériaux* (and 11 years after the publication of *Libidinal Economy*<sup>10</sup>).

In the *telematic shock* that *calls language into question* through technics (through the appearance of what Derrida, in *Echographies of Television*, called “teletechnologies”<sup>11</sup>) – that is, that calls *logos* into question through *tekhnē* – there occurs what I refer to as a *doubly epokhal redoubling*.<sup>12</sup> Between the two moments of the doubly epokhal redoubling work is performed, work in relation to the question of shock itself, that is, in relation to the question of the turn and of epokhality, of the *Kehre*, and finally of *Gestell*. In saying this, I am thinking not just of Lyotard reading Heidegger, but of Blanchot and Nietzsche – that is, of the “exigency of return” and the “change of epoch” to which Blanchot referred in *The Infinite Conversation*.<sup>13</sup>

*Les Immatériaux* undoubtedly set the scene in a premonitory way for what, from our standpoint today, began to unfold 21 years ago (at the end of April 1993), and that opened up the hyper-industrial scene of the twenty-first century. Just as Derrida, in *Archive Fever*,<sup>14</sup> foresaw the advent of today’s retentive question, so too Lyotard saw coming the *digital condition* – that is, the *computational condition* – borne by “language machines”, as he called them. And what will be heard over the infrared headphones offered to visitors to the exhibition is a strikingly clear noetico-sensory anticipation of the everyday digital realities of the twenty-first century.

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Like *Libidinal Economy* and like *The Postmodern Condition*, and for reasons that may be different in each case but that are part of a single line of inquiry, for

- 9 Simon Nora and Alain Minc, *The Computerization of Society: A Report to the President of France*, no translator listed (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981). First delivered in French in 1978.
- 10 Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).
- 11 Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews*, trans. Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002).
- 12 On the “doubly epokhal redoubling” see Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. Richard Beardsworth and George Collins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 233–238; Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 2: Disorientation*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 72–77; Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 34–36 and p. 112–116.
- 13 Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 264–281.
- 14 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).



me *Les Immatériaux* triggered both doubt and unease, but also admiration and even (though this is not true of *Libidinal Economy*) fascination. The doubt is both political and conceptual: the scene that opens up with *Les Immatériaux* (and in a way that will, by 2014, come to seem perfectly faithful in advance to the scene of the twenty-first century) is that of a *performativity of discourse*, a performativity that seems to *legitimate illegitimacy*, that seems to legitimate the end of narratives of legitimation founded on *the affirmation of law* as what always lies beyond any state of fact – the end of narratives founded on the *affirmation of this difference*.

What struck me then as a malaise – or what I would later refer to as a *mal-être* – and that strikes me today as denial and as *submission to a state of fact*, a denial and a submission *caused by a technological shock* consisting in the radical transformation of the world by telematics, is the very thing that seems, in the eyes of Vivek Chibber, if not to pave the way for, then at least to *legitimate*, a form of capitalist organization that leads to financialization, that is, to globalization as universalization by the market (as described, for example, by Deleuze<sup>15</sup>).

Nobody was clear-sighted about this at the beginning of the 1980s (except perhaps, precisely, Deleuze). But today we *must* be so – while nevertheless insisting that there is no light that does not cast a shadow: hence we must practise a pharmacology of enlightenments, which is also to say, a pharmacological critique of the *Aufklärung*, and we must do so in an epoch where technology functions at the speed of light. Without such a leap, we are finished: this is, for us, a duty and a historical task – where this “us” refers in particular to “digital studies”. The article published in *The Independent* on May 1st, 2014 by Stephen Hawking, Stuart Russell, Max Tegmark and Frank Wilczek testifies to the extreme urgency of the need to think this situation (even if their argument is conducted on bases other than those I am advocating here).<sup>16</sup>

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I read *The Postmodern Condition* in 1983, on the advice of Derrida and because he recommended taking Lyotard as my master’s degree supervisor. And this reading was undoubtedly what then allowed me to project myself beyond

15 Gilles Deleuze, “Control and Becoming”, *Negotiations*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 172-173; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 106.

16 Stephen Hawking, Stuart Russell, Max Tegmark and Frank Wilczek, “Transcendence looks at the implications of artificial intelligence – but are we taking AI seriously enough?”, *The Independent* (London), May 1, 2014, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/stephen-hawking-transcendence-looks-at-the-implications-of-artificial-intelligence--but-are-we-taking-ai-seriously-enough-9313474.html>.

Derrida and towards the question of technics and industry – even if, on the one hand, my immediate impression was that Lyotard had got caught up, along with Alain Touraine,<sup>17</sup> Talcott Parsons<sup>18</sup> and Daniel Bell,<sup>19</sup> in the fable of post-industrial society; and even if, on the other hand, I quickly came to the conclusion that his posture in relation to technics ultimately remained quite metaphysical (if not modern).

I believe that what remains metaphysical about technics in Lyotard must be related back to Kant: this is what I will now endeavour to show. I will try to do so, not by referring to “Theory and Practice”,<sup>20</sup> as I did in the final chapter of *Technics and Time*,<sup>3</sup><sup>21</sup> when I wanted to show the continuity that runs from Aristotle to Kant in terms of their common thought of technics in relation to “that which can be otherwise than it is”, *to endekhomenon allos ekhein*, but instead by returning to what, in my commentary on the transcendental deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason*,<sup>22</sup> I referred to as the fourth synthesis:<sup>23</sup> that of the *transcendental imagination as the power of exteriorization that founds tertiary retention and is founded on it, and that constitutes as such organological power and knowledge* (that is, the power and knowledge that arranges living, technical and social organs into a noetico-pharmacological becoming).

If the last *grand question* posed by Lyotard is that of the *differend*, if this question is *just* – in the sense of *Au juste*, of *Just Gaming*<sup>24</sup> – so that the four critiques (of pure reason, practical reason, aesthetic judgement, and the works on history) would be language games; and if *these games are not separable from an organology and from a process of grammatization that encompasses all grammatical questioning*, including in Wittgenstein’s sense; all this inclines towards and conjugates the experience of a *pharmacological default that must be*. And Lyotard *is incapable of* problematizing this pharmacological necessity *for the same reasons that so prevented Adorno*. Like Adorno, *Lyotard leaves in*

- 17 Alain Touraine, *The Post-Industrial Society. Tomorrow’s Social History: Classes, Conflicts and Culture in the Programmed Society*, trans. Leonard F. X. Mayhew (New York: Random House, 1971).
- 18 Talcott Parsons, “Some Reflections on Post-Industrial Society”, *Japanese Sociological Review* 24 (1973), p. 109–113.
- 19 Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
- 20 Immanuel Kant, “On the Common Saying: ‘This May be True in Theory, but it does not Apply in Practice’”, *Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 61–92.
- 21 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, trans. Stephen Barker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), chap. 6.
- 22 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929).
- 23 Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, p. 140–141, and see chap. 2.
- 24 Jean-François Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thébaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

*the shadows the question of the schematism* – and in this case, he leaves it in *the aesthetic shadow of the sublime*, that is, of the *infinite as the beginning and end of desire*.

And he thereby takes a turn that is not just linguistic, but aestheticizing, as do most of the philosophers of that period, and as does, today, Jacques Rancière – all thereby fleeing from the new question of political economy concealed in the becoming-techno-logical of the technics of grammatization, a becoming that has struck *logos* with an unprecedented shock.

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If we propose that there is a fourth synthesis, which makes possible the work of the three syntheses of the imagination as presented in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and as their arrangement; and if we posit that this synthesis is *tekhnē* – and I am here taking up Lyotard's theme in "*Logos and Techne*"<sup>25</sup> – then it is with Kant that we must discuss the *immatériau*.

For if the *schema* becomes *tertiary retention*, as I have argued in *Technics and Time*, 3, then it is an *immatériau* – as well as being what I call a *hyper-material*, supported and formed by *hyper-matter*.

(A word on this word, *immatériau* – which emerged from a seminar on the root "*mât*" given by Lyotard at the Collège international de philosophie: Lyotard was originally asked by the Centre de création industrielle of the Centre Pompidou to create an exhibition on new materials. The *immatériau* is *anything but immaterial*. It is not simply a material, but it is *very material*. This material is, notably, that of language machines – that is, of language, and with it of *logos*, deemed since the advent of metaphysics (that is, since Plato) to proceed from or originate in those immaterials that are the spiritual, the suprasensible, the intelligible, and so on. I would have liked to speak to you in these terms about what I call *hyper-matter*, but I cannot do this on this occasion. Were I able, I would have tried to show that the *immatériau* requires us to think what I have called the *organized inorganic* and the *power of organization* that results from the organological and pharmacological situation of this technical form of life that is, according to Georges Canguilhem, the non-inhuman<sup>26</sup> – but there is insufficient time for this here.)

In the economic and political context that was being engineered in the 1980s as the conservative revolution and ultra-liberalism – an economic and political context that exceeded thought, that thought was no longer capable of understanding – it is precisely the functioning and *dysfunction* of this schematism

25 Jean-François Lyotard, "*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*", *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

26 Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological*, trans. Carolyn R. Fawcett and Robert S. Cohen (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 200–201.

that fails to be understood. Soviet “materialism”, too, which was ultimately a dogma more than a philosophical position, a Stalinist and vulgar metaphysics, was incapable of conceiving, on the basis of Marxist concepts, the epistemological, philosophical, scientific and industrial stakes of information technologies; while in the West, these stakes were increasingly and in a very superficial way conceived as the advent of a “post-industrial” age (a term promoted by Daniel Bell and Alain Touraine, among others) – yet beyond this fable, the American computer and information industry continued to develop at an ever-increasing pace. The delusional discourse of the Soviets, Stalinists and ordinary Marxists about American power with respect to computational technologies was thus a clear historical symptom of the denial of the organological, pharmacological and hyper-material power of America: such a denial is symptomatic of the inability to think what is at stake, namely, the schematism concretized through what in *Technics and Time*, 3 I call *retentional systems*.

These systems are what, three years after *Les Immatériaux*, in Lyotard’s analysis of anamnesis and hypomnesia on the basis of the notions of breaching, scanning and passing, *The Inhuman* renders unthinkable.

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*Les Immatériaux*, as I have said, set the scene for Lyotard’s thesis on Kant, the relations between the four *Critiques*, and the impossibility of overcoming what Lyotard called their *differend* – which is a correlate of *différance*.

This interpretation of Kant constitutes the real issue of what, in 1979, Lyotard described as the “postmodern” condition – which I, some 30 years later, understand as being, rather, a techno-logical, organo-logical and pharmaco-logical condition.

This discourse of the *differend* posits that the cognitive is never enough, and argues that the didactic cannot *bear witness* to the *differend*, where the witness is a singularity that cannot be reduced and where this irreducibility is that of the figural. And this discourse is extended in *The Inhuman* into a discourse on technics – and on a technics omnipresent in *Les Immatériaux* that in my view Lyotard was unable to think other than as a *deceptive machine* attesting to the “postmodern condition” – as that which leads to rationalization, as Adorno and Horkheimer and then Habermas refer to or describe it after Max Weber.<sup>27</sup> But confronted with this rationalization, Lyotard concludes that nothing can be done.

27 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Allen and Unwin, 1930); Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Jürgen Habermas, “Technology and Science as ‘Ideology’”, *Toward a Rational Society*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 81–121.

Nothing can be done because no unification is possible for the *differend*, nor for the One, and so on. No unitive synthesis is possible. And hence there is no possibility of making or inscribing a difference of fact and law, in the sense of a subjective and unifying principle of differentiation.

Unification, however, *does occur*, and it does so, precisely, techno-logically – as a techno-logical synthesis that is the condition of the ana-mnesic synthesis; that is, of writing, and not as resistance, but rather as invention; that is, as the *après-coup* that constitutes the second moment of the doubly epokhal redoubling as a new process of transindividuation, constituting a new therapeutic of this *pharmakon* to which Stephen Hawking, Stuart Russell, Max Tegmark and Frank Wilczek refer without realizing it.

As for the notion that the second moment cannot take place due to the *speed* of a *pharmakon* that operates at the speed of light – that is, as *automaton* and absolute *pharmakon* – this is what in *States of Shock* I tried to show is an *ideological fable* that must be relentlessly combated. This question of speed requires us to think completely differently, and this includes, precisely, thinking the *pharmakon* as such – which is also to say, in its therapeutic positivity. But all this has become an obvious fact in relation to which we are obviously still very impoverished, and for this reason it calls upon us with the greatest urgency: all this can thus also mean we sink into deep melancholy, regardless of how “intelligent” we are purportedly becoming.

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Postmodernity would be the end of the emancipatory possibility and of “narratives” affirming and realizing a state of law: if it is true that rational knowledge is the capacity to decide this difference that is law within a state of fact, then this amounts to the problem that knowledge has become a commodity and is performatively submitted to a *factual systemic constraint* that *dissolves in advance* any extra-performative legitimacy (in the sense that Lyotard gives to “performative”, a sense that never quite seems clear, but that can clearly *not* be reduced to the Austinian definition, nor to the exegesis on this proposed by Derrida).

As for the differentiation of law within fact, this is an extremely timely question – as we will soon see in relation to “big data”, that is, high-performance computing applied to massive data sets. And here, we must resume the reading of Kant via *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*,<sup>28</sup> in order to recall that such a re-reading *today*, that is, *in the epoch of language machines*, is possible only *through a re-definition of the schematism on the basis of this immaterial hyper-material that is tertiary retention*, as literal tertiary retention

28 Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Cambridge, 2009).

as well as digital tertiary retention, but also as analogue tertiary retention – these three retentional types constituting what in *Technics and Time*, 2 I call *orthothetic hypomneses*. And at this point I would like to recall my analysis of these questions in *Technics and Time*, 3:

In dismissing this retentional fabric of the originary constituting of time, of what he calls the “ownmost time” of Dasein, and through his opposition to the “time of preoccupation” of the *They* or the *One*, under the pretext that tertiary retention is also the material support for the calculation and measurement of time, Heidegger is prevented from engaging a true critique of either Kant or Husserl: he does precisely the same thing he accuses Kant of doing.

If Kant was not able to detect this *contradiction*, in which he attempts to call the world back to an a priori principle, which is *his* contradiction – which shows that it is not possible for any flux of consciousness, even that of Kant himself, to respect his unifying principles, even when they have been formalized by that consciousness itself – this is, as Philonenko points out,

the result of his conception of space, which he conceives as the frame within which the world will lay itself out; in other words, *the Kantian subject has no originary relation to a world, but only to a space*; he is originary subject-without-world; it is because he has a space that he can have a world, and not because he has a world that he can have a space. Consequently, if space logically precedes the world and conditions its dimensions, the principle that allows the operation of an a priori distinction in space – the sense of left and right – will also allow me to operate a posteriori distinctions in the world. *It can thus be seen that the foundation of the Kantian analysis is at the same time its contradiction: it is the apriority of space, and yet it is nothing other than this apriority that is brought into question through the critique of the Kantian principle of orientation in space.* The true a priori, as the *need for a memory of any object’s position* clearly shows, is not space in the Kantian sense, but being-in-the-world.

But in fact, to have a world can *be* Dasein’s spatiality only because this in-the-world-ness is itself the in-the-world-ness of the *temporality* that is Dasein. Spatiality is the in-the-world-ness of Dasein. And Dasein’s in-the-world-ness is *first and foremost, as the already-there, its temporality*. Thus Dasein’s spatiality is its temporality. In other words, temporality must *itself be worldly* in a sense different from that which Heidegger accords to this qualifier when referring to “innerworldly” temporality, but which *operates through* this “innerworldliness” so that the in-the-world-ness

of the temporality of Dasein, as having-to-be *its* time, *weaves* it (Dasein's temporality) *as what conditions its synthesis*.<sup>29</sup>

None of this is problematized by Lyotard, even at the very moment he discusses the question of the unitive synthesis in Kant, or when he makes reference to the "immaterials" that are language machines; and this seems to me, today, highly problematic. Because it is *this* that constitutes the question of the *im-matériaux*, which is the question that, between the immaterial and the material, requires us to exceed the opposition between materialism and idealism, and to revisit the notion of "objects invested with spirit,"<sup>30</sup> notions of *hau*, *mana*,<sup>31</sup> *totem*, of categorization in Durkheim's sense,<sup>32</sup> and that can be thought only as what, exceeding the opposition of form and matter, and as hyper-matter, constitutes a tertiary retention forming the *immateriau* of all *Weltgeschichtlichkeit*, so to speak.

*Les Immatériaux* did set the scene for digital tertiary retention, but what it lacked was a hyper-materialist conception – a conception not postmodern, but *ultramodern*. Beyond the primacy of time over space (as internal sense) or of space over time (as *Umwelt* constituting a sphere or a *Lichtung*), there lies the question of speed; and, beyond this question, that of the relationship between automatization and dis-automatization – of automatization in the service of dis-automatization.

In *The Differend*, there is no One that would be reason. Do we therefore conclude that the reduction of knowledge to informational commodity would then be either possible or acceptable? About this reduction, Lyotard suggests we must "resist". I believe that we must, on the contrary, *invent*. We must invent a pharmacological critique (for the duplicity of the pharmacological situation is what the *default of the one* really means), a pharmacological critique that calls for an organology both theoretical and practical, that is: inventing and configuring its instruments according to the therapies and therapeutics that are the anamnestic transindividuation processes wherein disciplines are formed. This would be an organology that instantiates the *differend* – each time differently – through the *epochs* of tertiary retention and through the two moments of the doubly epokhal redoubling.

29 Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 3, p. 161–162, translation modified.

30 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. F. Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), p. 250. And see Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living: On Pharmacology*, trans. Daniel Ross (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), p. 72–74.

31 On *mana* and *hau*, see Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London and New York: Routledge, 1972), p. 133–134; and Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. W. D. Halls (London: Routledge: 1990), p. 1–12.

32 Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 21–33.

But there can be no organology, nor any pharmacology, without a new critique of political economy, and this must also be a positive critique of *The German Ideology*<sup>33</sup> – of the way it outlines an organology, and of its non-pharmacological character.

To look back in this way at the critical aftermath of the contemporary doubly epokhal redoubling, *where Lyotard would in the final reckoning have borne witness to the first moment*, we must re-read those pages of *Discourse, Figure* in which Lyotard raises the question of writing. For if, in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard *opposes* writing to telegraphy – and it is this opposition that constitutes the regression leading to the “philosophy of resistance” – in *Discourse, Figure* he apprehends writing from an extremely fruitful perspective, in relation to what I myself analyse as a retentive system:

Writing, unlike speech, institutes a dimension of visibility, of sensory spatiality ... [T]he discourse of signification haunted from within by the deconstructions specific to Mallarmean stylistics [is] affected in the exteriority of its (graphic) signifier by the same “primary” spatial play.<sup>34</sup>

One might then be able to reinvest anamnesis in terms of retentive systems *older than* drive-based systems. But if this is a site for construction, it must wait for another occasion. And our goal must be invention, conceived as an individuation at once psychic, collective and technical, where individuation is defined *essentially* as a technical and technological situation in which *tekhnē* and *logos* must not be opposed to each other, nor conflated, but where *logos* must be treated as an historical modality of the transindividuation of *tekhnē* qua process of grammatization – and in a situation that, today, produces a process of generalized proletarianization, a situation that is a matter of overcoming through the *invention of a new libidinal economy*.

Translated from the French by Daniel Ross.

33 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, no translator listed (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976).

34 Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, p. 63, and 482, translation modified.





# Exhibiting and Thinking: An Anamnesis of the Postmodern

Anne Elisabeth Sejten

Jean-François Lyotard's extraordinary exhibition *Les Immatériaux* was a complex, exciting cultural manifestation, and even 30 years later it is not hard to recall the special, joyful and intense atmosphere that surrounded the exhibition. Once it opened, the large gallery on the fifth floor of the Centre Pompidou was transformed into a laboratory that invited museum visitors to experience the arts, technology and philosophy as something tangible and corporal, yet also as highly intellectual and ambiguous. Entering the dark labyrinth pre-organised by the philosopher, one could not help but deconstruct and reconstruct a fragmented lesson on philosophy. For a moment, philosophy joined the public sphere on surprisingly philosophical premises.

Of course, this exhibition experience went beyond ordinary philosophy teaching. *Les Immatériaux* was conceived for neither amateur nor professional philosophers, but for the Centre Pompidou's broad, general public. Nevertheless, the philosophical agenda was quite obvious. Lyotard had just published *Le Différend*, a book of philosophy which, he claimed, espoused the "philosophy of sentences" upon which *Les Immatériaux* was built. The exhibition's concrete composition also rested upon a linguistic infrastructure – on the communication model of linguistic pragmatics – which again was a means of creating a Wittgensteinian playground for various linguistic families and enunciation instances, themselves incompatible and lacking a common meta-language that might summarise and articulate them as a whole. Lyotard chose five words to create zones of inquiry and physical arrangement: "maternity" (*maternité*), corresponding to the function of the sender; "material" (*matériel*), corresponding to the instance of the receiver; "material" (*matériau*), corresponding to the support of the message (the hardware that moves the

message); “*matrix*” (*matrice*), corresponding to the code of the message; and “*matter*” (*matière*), corresponding to the referent (what it is about). Each word focused on a diversity of questions: “From where?”, “To where?”, “How?”, “By means of what?”, and “Concerning what?” On the basic level of senders, receivers and codes, the entire exhibition was directly engaged in the study of media, questioning man in his relationship of troubled author to the materials of the technological, postmodern world.

In the same spirit, Kantian concepts implicitly inform the “sites”, which should be considered as particular, autonomous spaces, something more (or less) than mere stops on a one-way journey through the exhibition. How the sites were organised was reminiscent of the landscape or mapping that Lyotard liked to draw when it came to Kant and the third *Critique* (the *Critique of Judgement*), insofar as reflective judgement embodies the critical activity itself, an activity of establishing rules for different and specific uses of reason incommensurable with one another, and therefore demanding a rigorous demarcation of their respective realms of validity.

Such traces of Lyotard’s horizons of thought might in fact be said to function as the *transcendants* of *Les Immatériaux*. The exhibited items and sites would then seem to be permeated by two kinds of immateriality: one at a technological level, pointing to the *immaterials* they are made of (which also includes the inventive scientific mind); one at a more philosophical, conceptual level of *transcendents*, pointing to Lyotard’s idea about them – or, more precisely, his staging of them. Being one of the original features of *Les Immatériaux*, this duality remains a subject of inquiry when revisiting the exhibition so many years later. How were thinking and exhibiting, philosophy and exhibition space actually brought together? How could thinking and exhibiting possibly meet on an equal footing? How could one exhibit thinking at all? “Thinking” apparently seems to pass through “exhibiting” in a movement from inside out, and does not inform the exhibition from the outside in. The organisers’ aim was not to be pedagogical, but highly experimental; they demanded an intellectual effort on the part of the visitors. Even though the visitors were not meant to be philosophers, their sensory and intellectual involvement was required. But how did thinking and reflection, as specifically mental, immaterial activities, and join “the immaterials” of the exhibition? And how should we understand the only discourse that was explicitly assumed by the organisers, which pointed towards a changing condition of society as such, presenting the exhibition as “postmodern dramaturgy”?<sup>1</sup>

1 Jean-François Lyotard, “Les Immatériaux. Un entretien avec Jean-François Lyotard” (with Jacques Saur and Philippe Bidaine), *CNAC Magazine*, no. 26, 1985, p. 13. Also, in the opening words of the exhibition catalogue, the director of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Jean Maheu, evoked the “dramaturgy” of a “changing epoch” while speaking

In addressing these questions I propose to discuss more thoroughly how the almost hidden philosophical (transcendental) framework of *Les Immatériaux* was activated – or even performed – as an exhibition, revisiting “the post-modern” in particular as a major issue. Considering the many attempts Lyotard made after the publication of his 1979 *The Postmodern Condition* to explain and specify what he had intended by launching the debate, the exhibition could be seen as taking part in an ongoing anamnesis of the post-modern. From that perspective, *Les Immatériaux* concerns the issue of what had kept being forgotten in the debate on the postmodern.

### The Transcendentals of *Les Immatériaux*

While the term “transcendental” may appear inaccurate, it is more than an amusing play on words that makes “transcendentaux” rhyme with “Immatériaux”; it is, once again, a hint at Lyotard’s signature. During the 1980s, he had committed himself to a close reading of Kant. Both in *Le Différend* and at his weekly seminar at Paris VIII, Lyotard insisted on interpreting the Kantian project backwards, almost word for word, starting from the third *Critique*. And this re-reading of Kant, at its very source, was not only a matter of aesthetics – even though Lyotard’s interest in the sublime might initially have pushed him to undertake it. Rather, Lyotard was captivated by the destabilizing effect of the third *Critique*, and by Kant’s courage in reopening his critical project, re-examining, problematising and clarifying the fragile foundation of what he had previously achieved by establishing and separating, back to back, the two major faculties of man: understanding and reason. Because at the bottom of cognitive reason and practical reason, Kant rehabilitated reflective judgement, *die reflektierende Urteilskraft*. This rather complicated use of reason, which lacks any jurisdiction prior to its proceedings, thus has to establish, afterwards (*après-coup*), its own rules, reflexively in each particular case.

Lyotard insists on meeting Kant in this vulnerable, exposed – exhibited – position, in which the determining judgement finally has to step aside, recognising that it owes its solidity to an anterior activity of the mind, namely the reflective judgement, which cannot claim the same legitimacy, because it has to proceed without concepts. Logic is not an option here, which is why reflective judgement has to be deduced in an aesthetic context, as it is grounded on a feeling only, the feeling of the right adjustment between imagination and reason. Of course, there would be no philosophy without concepts. As Adorno stated in *Negative Dialectics*, “thinking is identifying”.<sup>2</sup> It is impossible to think without concepts, and philosophical concepts necessarily

about “postmodernity”. See *Album et Inventaire* (Paris: Editions du Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985), p. 3.

2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 17. (“Denken heißt identifizieren.”)

subsume the particular by means of universal categories. But following the very same commitment as that of Adorno, Lyotard dedicates his thinking to what does not disappear in the concept without leaving traces of resistance. He wants to bear witness to what he calls “the unrepresentable” or “the figural”, just as Adorno spoke about “the non-identical”.<sup>3</sup> So, if thinking essentially equals identifying and determining conceptual thinking, the non-determinable should nevertheless be the horizon of philosophy, its instigation and secret aim. With their polyphonic and heterogeneous space, “the Immaterials” offer a similar springboard for experimentation on the very edge of the exhibition’s conceptual entries, and are designed to make visitors sensitive without getting them caught in stigmatising conceptualisation. At the same instant that we are invited to approach what an exhibited object might represent, signify or challenge as “immaterial”, by marking it conceptually, the conceptualising activity of our minds should somehow be marked negatively by the affects that it causes.

For Lyotard, all the Kantian negative determinations of the aesthetic judgement of taste – being without interest, proceeding without concepts, having no other aim than its own purely formal finality “without purpose” – stand as an entry into the realm of philosophy *as such*; they have to do with the conditions of possibility for critical thinking. This is also why Lyotard was always emphasising the transcendental level of Kant’s criticism instead of dismissing it. By exploring the limits and conditions of knowledge and reason, Kant certainly deals with the conditions of possibility, which are a priori to any empirical reality; but he does so, not in order to escape reality, but rather in order to grasp those unrepresentable – thus immaterial – mental structures which make thinking possible.

*Les Immatériaux* simultaneously exhibits and builds upon such a transcendental framework. The Kantian horizon serves as more than just an external frame of reference towards the exhibition: with *Les Immatériaux*, rather, Kant becomes operational. Under the transcendental authority of reflective judgement, Kantian concepts such as the sublime and the *sensus communis* migrate into the organisation of *Les Immatériaux* and work there as a kind of *transcendentaux*. *Les Immatériaux* does not present a display of artworks and other objects accompanied by some philosophical explanation. It would be truer to argue that it embraces a transcendental dramaturgy, outlining the conditions of possibility in order to generate sensations in the spectator. The aim is to activate a sense of awareness of that which is not yet defined, or that is even undefinable. It is a matter of creating reactions, of generating intellectual and emotional attention. *Les Immatériaux* was philosophical in a truly experimental way, less because a philosopher exhibited his philosophy than because the exhibition aimed at making mental

3 Ibid., p. 152.

activity possible among those who walked down the labyrinth on their own, simultaneously transforming the exhibition into the interface of their random walking.

Pursuing the idea of this intimate relationship between thinking and exhibiting, it would not be wrong to say that *Les Immatériaux* was well-situated at the fifth floor of the Centre Pompidou, which was normally devoted to temporary art exhibitions; for the exhibition was precisely an artwork, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>4</sup> The exhibited items derived from all possible domains of knowledge and everyday life. Besides the artworks – among others, those emblematic of Giovanni Anselmo, Marcel Duchamp, Dan Flavin, Yves Klein, Joseph Kosuth, François Morellet, Philippe Thomas and Andy Warhol – visitors met a diverse range of technological and scientific documentation and objects: musical scores, architectural drawings, projections of photos and films, music videos, robots, and almost futuristic high-tech devices that were the precursor of interactive communication, anticipating today's social media – especially in the section called “Épreuves d'écriture”, which was displaying a computer-mediated discussion among 26 participants (including Jacques Derrida, Daniel Buren and Michel Butor) of 50 terms proposed by Lyotard. *Les Immatériaux* had indeed little to do with traditional or even advanced art exhibitions, nor did the organisers adopt a documentary format. The exhibition was nonetheless all that at the same time: documental *and* artistic *and* almost an amusement park where the spectator could try different attractions. This hybridisation of the exhibition genre contributed to creating a blurring effect, an uncomfortable unreadability that almost certainly characterises all art.

It might also be at this global level that the concept of “the sublime” makes sense. The sublime did not primarily work as a thematic guideline for *Les Immatériaux*, nor as an art-historical reference, but at a performative level; and like all performances, this again points to the visitor, who was solicited by her senses in a troubling way that one might compare to the sublime and its twofold structure of pleasure and displeasure. The iconic works of art that were exhibited – even those by Jacques Monory and Marcel Duchamp, about whom Lyotard wrote extensively – were not chosen for their possible aesthetic dialogue with the sublime. Somewhat surprisingly, Lyotard stressed that Duchamp's aesthetics had nothing to do with the sublime that it left behind.<sup>5</sup> The sublime instead concerns the exhibition as a whole, and has to do with its general opacity and resistance to being perceived in a simple way. If the exhibition was in fact difficult to read, to decipher, it was partly due to its fluid and immaterial organisation of space, by means of which human perception

4 Lyotard, interviewed by Bernard Blistène, confirmed his artistic ambition with the exhibition: “I'm particularly concerned with turning the exhibition itself into a work of art.” “Les Immatériaux: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard”, *Flash Art*, no. 121, March 1985, p. 8.

5 Ibid., p. 2.

came under pressure. This disruption of perception made it possible, however, for the visitor to experience – perhaps even joyfully – something at the very level of bodily perception, without really becoming readable in terms of sign, sense and signification.

Thus, perception was deliberately made problematic, interesting and shifting; it depended on how the different sites addressed different senses, intensified by the soundtrack. One major tool for creating potentially sublime experiences was the grey metallic curtains. Enabling a fluid and immaterial organisation of space, the partition material challenged traditional ways of defining things. Suspended from the ceiling to the floor, these unsteady, woven, thin metallic walls created a blocked transparency, more or less opaque, according to the lighting. In fact the variety of ways in which the curtains were lit allowed the distance of the gaze to vary, but without being prescriptive, since many of the sites had intersections that allowed visitors to walk in a number of different directions.

The dramaturgical setting created a sort of theatricality of *Les Immatériaux*, but essentially from the visitor's perspective. If the exhibition was conceived as theatre – even, according to the first site of the exhibition, as “Theatre of the non-body” – this theatre, again, was basically conceived as a performance that engaged the visitor in his or her entirety. A striking example on the “material” track is that of the site “Musician despite himself”, where microphones, sonars and computers translated every movement visitors made into music, the sound made audible by the transmitter circuit and headphones. This set-up also indicated that the eye should no longer be the sole conduit of perception in the exhibition experience. In the exhibition catalogue, Lyotard vindicates postmodern space-time as a radically new way of organising an exhibition, explicitly breaking with the traditional organisation of art exhibitions that accorded an exclusive privilege to the eye for centuries.<sup>6</sup>

In achieving this ambition, the most radical ingredient was perhaps the soundtrack, which changed from one radio zone to another as the visitors walked around the exhibition space. Completely void of commentaries of any kind, the soundtrack contained acoustic presences, texts by authors such as Beckett, Artaud, Proust, Borges, Mallarmé and Zola, but also by theoreticians, philosophers and scientists like Barthes, Bachelard, Blanchot, Baudrillard, Virilio and Lyotard himself – voices that could thus take part in what might be at stake in each specific site. The texts were read aloud in a neutral way, deliberately avoiding any interpretation of the words spoken. These real, immaterial works were actually nothing but voices, yet they in fact seemed material, corporeal, like music entering the flesh, challenging the presence of absences. This context may also afford us an understanding of Lyotard's

6 See *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 19.

increasing interest in Malraux, to whom he devoted a philosophical biography ten years later. Essentially, Lyotard tried to rethink Malraux's old question of "the voices of silence" in terms of his own ideas about making visible, audible, and thus thinkable, that which cannot be seen, heard or thought. That paradox also constitutes the inner structure of what Lyotard associated with the concept of the sublime – and, accordingly, with the attempt to bear witness to the unrepresentable (at this point he is following, as noted, Adorno).

In the end, there seems to be no real consensus about what these "Immaterials" should stand for. They are indeed made ambiguous and contradictory, with the only intention to call for attention and become *in act*, as Paul Valéry would have put it. "The Immaterials" demanded that they be acted upon by visitors. It was a matter of engendering a state of mind, where sensibility, affection and reflection were mobilised in an open, free, non-determined play, not necessarily as an activity, but as pure receptiveness, sensitiveness. It was a matter of being able to receive something without defining it. This openness and indetermination brings us back to reflective judgement and, more specifically, to the *sensus communis* that Kant deduces in the fourth moment of the judgement of taste. Lyotard interprets the *sensus communis* in a restrictive, purely transcendental way.<sup>7</sup> *Sensus communis* is not an empirical consensus regarding the beautiful; it has nothing to do with a shared community, but points to a sign – or a testimony, or a promise – of compatibility between the faculties within each subject. What makes *sense here* is the mere capacity to think reflexively, which can only be considered afterwards, as emphasised again and again by Lyotard.

This complicated concept thus points to a self-reflexivity, caused by the aesthetic shock that can only ever be experienced individually. Be it students of Lyotard, regular museum visitors or random visitors of any background, the task is the same. *Les Immatériaux* was meant to encourage this specific kind of reflection, a sort of intellectual sensibility, or sensible intellectuality, towards these heterogeneously exhibited objects that might perhaps, not in themselves, but thanks to their complex staging, inspire a feeling of uncertainty; an uncertainty about the aim of technological developments, and an uncertainty about the identity of the human individual. It is at precisely this point that the issue of the postmodern arises as a challenge that justifies taking a closer look at the rather complicated philosophical agenda assumed by the postmodern in Lyotard.

7 Jean-François Lyotard, "Sensus Communis," *Le cahier du collège international de philosophie*, no. 3 (1987), p. 71–74, and Lyotard, *Leçons sur l'analytique du sublime* (Paris: Galilée, 1991), p. 31–33.



## ***Les Immatériaux*: an Exhibition of Postmodernity?**

On the one hand, postmodernity happened to be the only discursive element that informed the exhibition thematically, giving it a strong symbolic value. On the other hand, postmodernity was not exhibited in any representative way. To be sure, the mayor of Paris, Jacques Chirac, had turned down President François Mitterrand's request that Paris celebrate the bicentennial of the French Revolution with a universal exhibition, which is why *Les Immatériaux* can be seen as an ironic comment to both politicians; in other words, as a sort of universal exposition of postmodernity. Anticipating the exhibition that would not take place in 1989, on the other hand, *Les Immatériaux* indirectly became the symbol of the end of universal exhibitions and a symbol of their impossibility.

Nonetheless, the general question about how the relationship between man and nature, or materials, was "affected by the revival of new technologies" was indeed, from the very beginning, subject to a postmodern framing. In an interview Lyotard gave on *Les Immatériaux* when the exhibition was still being planned, he clearly states that the entire exhibition was meant to address our "anxiety about the postmodern condition".<sup>8</sup> And his reply to the question about what postmodernism could "finally" be said to be confirms his commitment to that question: "My work, in fact, is directed to finding out what that is, but I still don't know. This is a discussion that's only just beginning. It's the way it was for the Age of Enlightenment: the discussion will be abandoned before it ever reaches a conclusion".<sup>9</sup>

This remark is rather prophetic, the question of the postmodern having probably already caused Lyotard more trouble than philosophical scrutiny, and he would indeed ultimately have to abandon the postmodern before coming to terms with it. Still, it is worth noting how Lyotard's attachment to the postmodern was heavily inscribed in the initial ideas underlying the exhibition. *Les Immatériaux* somehow *elaborates* on the postmodern. Indeed, the postmodern might even refer to the "missing signified" for "the entirety of the exhibition".<sup>10</sup> At any rate, it is in a vocabulary which combines the postmodern and the sublime that Lyotard connects *Les Immatériaux* to the "chagrin that surrounds the end of the modern age as well as the feeling of jubilation that's connected with the appearance of something new".<sup>11</sup>

These comments recall the philosophical work that Lyotard called *anamnesis*, a term he had borrowed from Freud and made use of to describe situations

8 "Les Immatériaux: A Conversation with Jean-François Lyotard," (with Bernard Blistène) *Flash Art*, no. 121 (March 1985), p. 10.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

in which the philosophical community was affected by discomfiting feelings. His 1988 book on Heidegger (*Heidegger and "the Jews"*), for example, was presented as an anamnesis, by means of which Lyotard dismissed the bad alternative between "accusations" and "apology" that characterised the vehement French Heidegger debate at that time. How could a thought devoted entirely to the theme of oblivion, the oblivion of being, forget and keep silent about relegating a whole people to oblivion? Something non-forgettable is forgotten, over and over again. Even though the Heidegger disciples already knew, even though they were aware of the problem of Nazism in Heidegger, a disquieting feeling remained, and Lyotard insisted on that disquietude as fundamental. The postmodern debate might have needed a similar treatment, a kind of anamnesis, elaborating on what had gone wrong in that debate – that is to say, what kept being forgotten.

The publication of *The Postmodern Condition* in 1979 made Lyotard world-famous and many people began reading him at this particular point; which is somewhat ironic given that *The Postmodern Condition* happens to be the least representative of his works. Postmodernism can likewise be considered an event. Something new had finally happened within philosophy and the humanities – not, of course, without dissention, and the media did not hesitate to dramatise the event, often by opposing French irrationalism to German fidelity to the Enlightenment. The battle of postmodernism was on. Considering Lyotard's attitude towards the Heidegger affair, just drawing the lines of battle should be a warning. What had become of the event, philosophically speaking? Precisely the feeling that the debate had failed to address the issue of the postmodern – and failed painfully – demanded a reinvestigation of the postmodern.

Initially, the term postmodern addressed the changing status of knowledge in philosophy in highly developed societies (the subheading of *The Postmodern Condition* is *A Report on Knowledge*). On the one hand, Lyotard stresses the impact of informatics (and information science) on knowledge. The capacity to store an ever-increasing amount of data necessarily affects knowledge and, accordingly, challenges crucial notions such as those of history, memory and time. *Les Immatériaux* continued to explore that perspective. On the other hand, the provocative thesis on the decline of the grand narratives contributed to a postmodern definition of knowledge. From Hegel to Marx, a recitative structure works at the core of the philosophy of history, Lyotard argues. The discourses of knowledge issuing from this tradition are narratives, because, although laying claim to scientific stringency, their truth claims are supported by a narrative which, scientifically speaking, is not knowledge at all. They simply tell a "good story" – the story, for example, about the progress of humanity towards an ever-better society. When a *telos* of this nature is hidden in the discourse of knowledge, this discourse can hardly give proof

of its validity (as scientific knowledge) by pleading the scientific criteria of truth or falsity. The idea of a predestined humanity cannot be proved; it is only, as Lyotard later shows with Kant, a universal “Idea”, inconceivable to the cognitive reason of history.

It is probably at this far too “famous” point of the grand narratives that we have to remain careful. According to the debates on postmodernity, the failure of the grand narratives of legitimation became the whole crux of the matter. How, for example, does one adopt a position towards this decline, now an object of celebration and affirmation, now an object of lamentation and depression? Focusing exclusively on the issue of the grand narratives, the debate inevitably disintegrated into opinions and mainstreams – in a word, into ideology – without much attention being paid to the fact that the experience of delegitimation was not new, but rather immanent in modernity. When, for example, Lyotard (again following Adorno) refers to the name “Auschwitz”, he wants to pay attention to a “sign of history”, which indicates how much Western history – “our” history – is apparently inconsistent with the modern project of emancipation. In a certain way, real history, atrociously real, has denied the possibility of a human history already. The radically new in the postmodern situation, as Lyotard explains in *The Postmodern Condition*, was that, by means of a performative self-legitimising gearing, technological development and science had become adherent to the critique of the philosophy of history to eventuate its final fall.

Thus, if postmodernity does not represent a new age, but rather repeats essential features of modernity, it points to a different way of legitimating that gives rise to concern, and that concern was evidently shared by the organisers of *Les Immatériaux*. The whole idea of a subtle change within legitimating processes clearly motivated the organisation and specific site designs, insofar as the exhibition was meant to make the visitor experience new technologies in ambiguous ways. Fascination, uncertainty, anxiety, if not disgust, are associated with all the various site names: “Site of the second skin”, “Site of the angel”, “Site of the blown-up body”, “Site of the undiscoverable surface”, “Site of the bodiless painter”, “Site of the invisible man”, “Site of the shadow of shadow” etc. With *Les Immatériaux* Lyotard implicitly delivers a challenge to be sensitive – and this in an almost auditory sense – towards something that more than ever is silenced by the postmodern techno-reality. Regardless of how we address *Les Immatériaux*, the postmodern reference keeps cropping up, but becomes more and more complex and ambiguous. That is why we must risk, even 30 years later, an anamnesis of the postmodern.

## Postmodernism, Postmodernity, the Postmodern: Which One to Choose?

A reconstruction of the postmodern certainly requires a global approach and a more retrospective cross-reading of Lyotard. *The Postmodern Condition* seems to prefer the sociological and historical aspect to the philosophical – a point of contention to which Lyotard was the first to concede and to renounce. In subsequent years corrections, addendums and elaborations characterise his attempt to defend the importance of the postmodern question, to rescue it, even though the term had already been abused. As mentioned above, *The Differend*, published in 1983, contains this original “philosophy of sentences” that rephrases the problem of legitimation that was at the core of the book on the postmodern condition. In 1986 Lyotard published various essays attempting to outline the implications of the postmodern question in *The Postmodern Explained for Children*. The provocative title, it should be noted, embraces more than irony. The appeal to children implies that only those who have not excluded childhood, including its aspect of indetermination, from the supposedly self-enclosed sphere of adulthood, may come to an understanding of the postmodern. In 1988 another collection of essays appeared in *The Inhuman*, which again takes up, though more indirectly, the postmodern question, this time with a straight-faced attack on French neo-humanism.<sup>12</sup> What these essays share is a sharp demarcation whereby Lyotard forbids any ideological expropriation of the concept of the postmodern. One could say that he separates the postmodern from postmodernism as well as from postmodernity.

On the one hand, the postmodern is not identical to postmodernism. Postmodernism avoidably infers an “-ism”, which here points to a trend within the arts and – especially in this case – within architecture. Architectural postmodernism may be defined as eclecticism – an assemblage of fragments of style from various periods. The final work of art (of architecture) appears as “quotations” from earlier periods and hence as a paradoxical stating of the present, which is incapable of inventing a new “grand” style. However, a careless use of the past might run contrary to this exercise of memory, which Lyotard, drawing on Freud, designates anamnesis. The anamnesis instead refers to an interminable labour of memory in the act of elaborating something that is permanently blocked. Anamnesis seeks an inaccessible past. In this sense it might not be surprising if Lyotard condemns postmodernism insofar as postmodernists, architects, rhetoricians or others act as if the past were accessible; in reality, they are only repeating defence mechanisms towards resistant moments, which cannot be repeated but ask for

12 Victor Farias's 1987 book, *Heidegger*, instigated the fierce French Heidegger debate.

“elaboration”, i.e. to be “worked through” in conformity with the epistemology of the Freudian *Durcharbeitung*.

On the other hand, the postmodern is not the same as postmodernity. The postmodern does not essentially mark a new epoch coming after modernity. Even though some explanations concerning *Les Immatériaux* seem to indicate a change in society, Lyotard refutes the idea of an epoch-making change of paradigm. The postmodern change instead inscribes itself in modernity. As he emphasised during the same period in the mid-1980s – specifically in the important “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?”<sup>13</sup> – the postmodern is not to be situated at the end of modernity, but at the source of modernity, which fundamentally reveals the discovery of the “*little bit of reality in reality*”.<sup>14</sup> Issuing from this tradition, the postmodern communicates with an essential aspect of modernity: the lack of foundation, the lack of grounding.

What are we left with after getting rid of the most prevailing biases of the postmodern? Not much, really. One of the difficulties of the postmodern probably consists in its duality. The postmodern seems to concern system as well as resistance. A basically descriptive approach refers to technological and social development, to what we could call *system*. But the feeling of a postmodern situation simultaneously manifests, although more implicitly, something that *resists* system. These two poles, system and resistance, are intertwined. For what the system cannot absorb and, therefore, excludes, the pole of resistance tries to restore and elaborate. Once again, as in Freudian anamnesis, elaboration happens to be the essence of resistance.

The complicity of this unlikely pair – system/resistance – is central to grasping the philosophical depth in Lyotard’s postmodern. In arguing for the duality of the postmodern, I will adhere in particular to Lyotard’s 1988 book *The Inhuman*, whose essays outline two kinds of inhumanities. And, seen from this later point of view, the postmodern must be thought of from an axis passing through two essentially different inhumanities, which were indeed also addressed by *Les Immatériaux*. The first one implies the necessity of seeking refuge and resistance in the other one. By virtue of this internal tension there appears an almost ethical, if not political, aspect that takes place in, and vitalises, the postmodern.

13 It is worth noting that the term chosen by Lyotard in the original French title was “post-modern” and not “postmodernism”: *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilée, 1986).

14 “Réponse à la question: qu’est-ce que le postmoderne”, op. cit., p. 25 (“la découverte du peu de réalité de la réalité”).

## The Inhumanity of System

The first inhumanity could be said to concern system. It refers to an inhuman order, where man happens to occupy a minor place. In post-industrial society the discrepancy between system and man has in fact become more and more visible. Increasing control within the sciences and technologies, paradoxically, has not resulted in greater human autonomy, but rather in loss of control. The current economic crisis is but a recent example of these fatal dynamics. The postmodern condition as reality, as situation, actualises – in the most literal meaning of the word – a complexification in which humankind is only one subordinated link.<sup>15</sup> Performance, differentiation and complexity cover an inhuman condition that we were once bold enough to call progress and development. In this sense, Lyotard argues, system's inhumanity, in the name of Progress, is about to be realised.

This accomplishment is indeed a question of time, and is very much actualised by the new computer technologies that were massively present in – and placed in question by – *Les Immatériaux*. What is left when the storing of data reaches the point of saturation, asks Lyotard, which is a question that also haunts *Les Immatériaux*. If memorisation approaches a maximum, the increasing memory reduces the chance or risk that something not yet memorised can occur. The saturation of data simply means the neutralisation of events. The future subordinates the present, because, when the future is already determined (memorised), the present loses the privilege of being a moment that cannot be grasped in itself. The tension of the event is simply broken in that the event is always an occurrence between a “not yet” (*pas encore*) of the future and an “already no more” (*déjà plus*) of the past. Nothing occurs, in the sense of the event, if everything is programmed in advance, already memorised and saved in the computer bank. The modern project, understood as the belief in a human future to come, paradoxically ends up as a program, in the sense of programmed future; and this accomplished future must necessarily destroy the last remnants of the human project that sought freedom.

Equally, invoking Leibniz's monadology, Lyotard compares computer time to the divine monad.<sup>16</sup> God's “big monad” coincides with the universe; it is congruent with the universe, because even the most remote and humble corner falls within God's field of vision. This is the reason why realisation of the divine monad necessarily causes a loss of human and historical time – this time which precisely is invested by the inadequacy of individual monads and their merely partial knowledge of the universe. As a monadological analogy, the

15 See Jean-François Lyotard, *L'inhumain* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), especially the “Avant-propos: de l'humain,” p. 13, as well as the chapter entitled “Le temps, aujourd'hui,” p. 75, and 78.

16 Ibid., p. 49, and 71.

postmodern condition might resume the movement in which all the individual monads approach the “big monad”, thus being dissolved in its perfection.

The “time-saving” nature of computers and their eventual destruction of human historical time was probably a basic idea motivating Lyotard when he first brought the postmodern situation up for discussion, but also when he sketched out the exhibition design for *Les Immatériaux*. In contradistinction to modernity, where the source of legitimation is displaced in the ideal future to become present, postmodernity founds its legitimacy upon itself, upon a kind of self-sufficiency, as if it were the “big monad”. Postmodernity does not need ideologies, because it legitimises itself. Its horizon does not lie in the future, but is here already. The nature of its goal is self-ensured by the performative gearing of the system. Legitimacy, thus, is no longer a problem; the universal project of emancipation of modernity is no longer separated from reality as an Idea regulating moral and political actions and decisions. Instead, it is immediately consumed by technological expansion itself.

This collapse between reality and Ideas confronts philosophy with a challenge. For when reality no longer differs from the Ideas, metaphysics actually disappears from the remit of philosophy. The traditional field of thinking is now monopolised by information sciences, because they simply realise metaphysics, outside philosophy. Metaphysics, which ought to assume an ideal content beyond what is conceivable, becomes an inhuman reality, and even obtains the rights of facticity.

## The Inhumanity of Resistance

How can this first inhumanity, one which constitutes a challenge to philosophy, be resisted? How can critical thinking and an attitude that deals with this logic of inhuman development be maintained? Taking these questions seriously, Lyotard concentrates on another inhumanity at the core of the human being itself. If the first inhumanity, the systemic one, connotes an over-human level of complexification, this other inhumanity points to an ontological aspect, to the inner individual. But no preposition is adequate to situate this “inside”, which is rather “under” or “behind” innerness. Something radically other and estranged occupies the individual. It might be at this difficult, implacable level that the second aspect of the postmodern can precipitate resistance.

These ideas on the second inhumanity might seem cryptic and need, in fact, to be related to Lyotard’s understanding of childhood as such – and, in particular, to his interest in the Freudian concept of “originary repression”. Lyotard refutes humanism in the allegorical name of childhood. Childhood cannot be elevated and negated in the dialectical manner of Hegel’s *aufgehoben* without something being left behind. An untameable and invincible childhood remains deeply engrained in every grown-up; it is this childhood that announces the

inhumanity now in question. Deep in human nature – which perhaps is not all that human, and not all that deep – smoulders a pain, a suffering; because civilised man, from family to state, has to endure society's institutions. Of course, anomalous behaviour bears witness to such immoral needs of escaping from social conventions and social life. However, literature, the arts and philosophy – these activities of spirit that, paradoxically, have obtained institutional status in our society – do it as well. Lyotard interprets these domains as vestiges of an indetermination and a childhood that grown-up life never totally rids itself of.

Lyotard argues, in other words, against a dialectical closing of childhood. Something does not add up. He calls it *l'inaccordable*<sup>17</sup> – “the non-accordable” – the absence of accordance. Just as when he refers to Hölderlin's *Remarks on Oedipus* (1804), saying that the beginning no longer rhymes with the end. The end is no longer inscribed in the beginning, as in the Greek oracle. Thus, the disharmonies of modernism replace classical harmonies. It might be accidental that the attention being paid to the “non-accordable” resorts to a vocabulary of music. It is, however, in fact appealing to the ear; Lyotard makes an appeal to hearing, because the moment we have to pay attention to is almost immaterial, unrepresentable. It is only a voice calling.

Enduring this context it is useful to consider Lyotard's persistent reference to the Freudian concept of *originary repression*, an interest which goes back to *Discourse, Figure* from 1971. Within this specifically psychoanalytic context, man's childhood likewise becomes an incommensurable moment. Its place appears as a non-place, because something that has not taken place in the psyche nevertheless always already will have taken place. The notion of an “originary” or primary repression thus embodies an almost archaic jolt, prior not only to consciousness, but also to sub-consciousness. Secondary repression, in contrast, can be said to refer to distinct disturbances which are accessible through the interpretation of dreams. So, when we speak of primary repression, we refer to something having shaken and affected the subject without, however, having left any representative inscriptions in the psyche. This archaic moment implies that no proper reception has been made and, consequently, no defence against this initial jolt exists. The “object” of the originary repression only returns later, *after* the jolt, when the psyche already will have been affected. This return manifests itself as an intangible anxiety, because a stranger will already have taken the individual as hostage. Confronted with this non-object beyond time and space, Lyotard invokes the immemorial. Something emanates from a past, something which defies every present, because the forgotten has never been memorised by any consciousness or sub-consciousness; a kind of oblivion before memory, and what is left

17 Lyotard, *L'inhumain*, p. 12.



are only traces of a primary life-giving terror – the non-forgettable forgotten, as Lyotard writes in *Heidegger and “the Jews”*.

This shift in interest from the secondary repression to the primary repression allows Lyotard to approach an inborn inhumanity that destabilises the integrity of the individual from the inside out. This inhumanity clearly refers to another, entirely different, temporality than the time implied in an informational system, as described before. Something already *will have* happened before it later (and far too late) returns to the subject as anxiety and pain. In fact, the crux of the matter for Lyotard emerges here: if we were to try to precipitate the initial jolt, we would be too early, for our psychic apparatus is not yet formed; whereas any time afterwards is too late. It is exactly here (where?), between the “too early” and the “too late”, in the ungraspability of the future perfect, this “always already will have happened”, that this occurrence resides.

What does all this have to do with resistance? Let us not forget to note that the paradoxical temporality of the future perfect reappears in the modality of occurrence of the event. So affected by the future perfect, thought might be able – however painfully – to experience events and hence to seek that which system excludes. Binary logic only receives information that is immediately classifiable. System embraces the already given and not that which simply occurs, i.e. that which is arriving in the sense of the German *es gibt*. Such heterogeneous occurrences can occupy no byte. In this sense, it is staggering how much information “reason” must exclude: literature, poetry, free association (in the psychoanalytic sense), indeed ordinary language – that is to say, any non-operative use of language that eventuates the unrepresentable to be experienced and formulated.

Experiences, under the sign of the future perfect, therefore, increase the distance to well-organised and unconcerned social life. In company with psychoanalysis, which aims to disrupt the repetitions generated by the defence mechanism of memory, we should concentrate on resisting the repetitions and the defence mechanisms of society. Social interaction and communication would then be transcended by a reflexive work of memory caring for that which is not inscribed in the universe of informatic significations. Even the word “culture” signifies the circulation of information rather than the work to be done to get to the point of presenting what is not presentable in its occurrence. And yet, perhaps in cultivating the inhumanity inherent to man, this reduction of culture to the circulation of bytes of information might be opposed.

## Towards a Postmodern Ethics?

In the end, Lyotard's postmodern position seems less and less definable, becoming more and more complex. Uncertain, modest and open, these, and similar, words might be used to characterise his questioning of a "post-modern situation". He does not seek simple answers – the simple which is, as he once said, the barbarian – but rather intends to expose and elaborate the fundamental disquietude facing this pretended postmodern reality.

However, the asymmetrical tension whereby the two inhumanities take a place in the postmodern question – that is to say, their inarticulation, because they follow two different directions – can be articulated quite simply. In fact, it is as if we have but to be open to the second inhumanity – that inhumanity being housed in the empty heart of the subject – in order to resist the first inhumanity, system's inhumanity. When the second inhumanity is sought, elaborated and cultivated as a work of reflexion, something unbearable appears to the logic of system – namely, an inoperative presence of absence. But resistance can never be positive. This is the very point, if one insists upon a specific postmodern position. Resistance remains bound to the inhuman aspect. Because that which constitutes the subject is radically other, the force of resistance cannot be positive. Rewriting Freud's originary repression, Lyotard reveals a subject that is obliged to the condition of the afterwards-ness (*Nachträglichkeit*, *après-coup*), because something has affected it before mental receptivity.

The question, then, becomes one of how to interpret a resistance, considered in this negative perspective, in terms other than those outlining a kind of ethics. In fact, Lyotard does seem to allow an ethical problematic to inform the postmodern. A certain vocabulary of ethics dealing with an obligation toward the unknown Law recurs almost word-for-word in this attentiveness toward an unknown voice *in* the subject. We have to listen to a strange voice whose message cannot be deciphered by signifying language or by phenomenological perception, and we have to bow to the law emanating from this inhumanity that inhabits man and forbids him to become his own master. On the strength of playing on an obvious ethical theme, Lyotard seems to appeal to a specific attitude concerning the thinking subject, which we recognise in *Les Immatériaux*. It is not a simple matter of passivity versus activity, but rather of an attitude, which, in French, is called *passibilité*. This passibility is to be understood as a form of receptivity that presupposes a withdrawal of the conceptualising subject. Ethics, in this sense, is not a call, but rather the ability to be called upon from something unknown.

In general, Lyotard wants to commit philosophy to heterogeneous and vanishing – that is, immaterial – objects. In a certain way, he keeps drawing nourishment from an almost secret layer of philosophy. The decline of

master narratives perhaps signifies the end of philosophy as institutional metaphysics, but is not the end of philosophy as such – as thinking, as questioning, as use of reflective judgement. On the contrary, when Lyotard announced a postmodern challenge to philosophy, he outlined much more than a simple coming to terms with the philosophy of history, a settlement, which obviously precedes his entire work. Even his hostile analysis of Marxism as an example of a grand narrative, narrating the future victory of the working class, hardly justifies either relief or total disillusionment, as if there was no need for philosophy any more. There is a reflexive work to be done – in the name of that which is excluded from reality and, what is even more urgent (and more difficult to realise), in the name of that which cannot be presented by any reality. And this work is, indeed, and perhaps more than ever, instigated by the postmodern banalisation and vulgarisation of reality. This postmodern reality neutralises what is “real”. It destroys the event. As in the Heidegger debate, the postmodern debate seems to be an occasion for Lyotard to recall that which haunts thought.

This peculiar ethics traverses the anaesthetic aesthetics of *Les Immatériaux*, where we have to be sensitive to the signs of postmodern a-teleology – even if these signs, signifying almost nothing, are particularly ambiguous – in order to realise a postmodern situation at all. In that respect, *Les Immatériaux* played an active part in Lyotard's efforts to rethink the postmodern, even to rescue it by means of instruments that did not have to be restricted to the medium of the book. That is why, conversely, *Les Immatériaux* can itself be seen as a kind of performative philosophy, transforming Lyotard's thoughts into action, especially his ongoing reflections on the nature of the event. The postmodern dramaturgy of the exhibition aimed to make the visitors experience how something already *will have* happened. Regardless, without sensibility, there would be no disquietude and no questioning. Pointing to something like postmodern sensibility, Lyotard and his team at *Les Immatériaux* attempted to transform a cultural event into possible events of sensitivity at the edge of conceptual thinking, a kind of intellectual sensitivity that brings us back to reflective judgement.

In conclusion, we could say that “the postmodern” would have liked to join the list of ambiguous concepts that Lyotard kept questioning throughout his works; concepts such as “figurality”, “heterogeneity”, “dissension”, “the event”, “the thing” (*la chose*), “desire” – all terms that point to the fact that what is sought marks a difference that cannot be organised around a common axis. This was precisely his definition of “*le différend*”, which evoked an asymmetrical conflict arising from the lack of a common language. And yet perhaps, before joining this philosophical family, the postmodern got lost in ideology and the mainstream. Maybe the postmodern was simply too exposed by the media to be able to assume a real exhibiting function – that is, this “over-exposure” by

means of which Lyotard and his team at *Les Immatériaux* would have liked to instigate reflection upon the human condition in an increasingly technological world. However, when we both look back on the exhibition's many innovative, performative features, and look forward to curatorial practices that it might have subsequently inspired, the almost untraceable, but undeniable long-term effects of *Les Immatériaux* force us to perceive the degree to which Lyotard strained every nerve to transform the postmodern from being a term of mere historical classification into a philosophical agenda. The postmodern, thus, would have called for an increasing awareness of and a critical reflection on a high-technological society and its materials, which have become vertiginously immaterial.



# Anamnesis and Re-Orientation: A Discourse on Matter and Time

Yuk Hui

*The whole question is this: is the passage (anamnesis) possible, will it be possible with, or allowed by, the new mode of inscription and memoration [mémoration] that characterizes the new technologies? Do they not impose syntheses, and syntheses conceived still more intimately in the soul than any earlier technology has done?*<sup>1</sup>

Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux* can be read as a profound discourse on matter and time, one that aims to go beyond the simple correlation between technics and memory, and toward the anamnesis of the unknown – or better, as I will explain below, the re-orientation of the Occident. Plato memorably described matter as the foster-mother in the *Timaeus*, where he proposes a third genre of being in addition to the two he had discussed previously – an eternal intelligible pattern and the imitation of such pattern. The third genre, explains Plato, “is the receptacle, and in a manner the foster-mother, of all generation”.<sup>2</sup> Matter is the receptacle, but also the medium of inscription. Hence in Lyotard's

- 1 Jean-François Lyotard, “Logos and *Techne*, or Telegraphy”, in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 57.
- 2 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, [classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html](http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html); translation modified.

system of “mat-” we find maternity.<sup>3</sup> Time stands for multiple senses: memory, history, repetition, anamnesis. The new theoretical rigour that Lyotard wanted to show throughout *Les Immatériaux* and beyond – especially as expressed in his essay collection *The Inhuman*, published after the exhibition – demonstrates a philosophical effort to transcend the totality anticipated by rapid technological development, seeking a new mode of determination of matter and indetermination of thought. *Les Immatériaux* serves as a critique of the Occidental tradition of philosophising. One can identify both an affinity to Heidegger yet also a desire to take a distance from him, since the question of the Other stands at the centre of Lyotard’s inquiry.

This article aims to elaborate on Lyotard’s anamnesis of the Other, and to introduce another question on rethinking the potential of new technologies. I suggest that these two questions are closely related to each other, and in the rest of the article I want to show how.

The Other stands for an addressee and an addresser, as well as the condition of a *différend*, which turns against itself and produces the *différend* as an opening of questions. Michel Olivier has rightly pointed out that the *différend* is not contingent – rather, it is already within the language. If we understand the *différend* here as the conflict between the different rules of two parties, how then can we think about the question of translation? To what extent can a translator be loyal to the *différend*? This will depend on another question: How sensitive is the translator toward the *différend*? This Other stands as the interlocutor of the anamnesis that Lyotard endeavoured to propose. To ask who this Other is, we first have to answer the question: Is the postmodern merely a European project? And if it is a European project, then would such a discourse be applicable to non-European cultures?

## The Postmodern – Is it a European Project?

This question is ambivalent. Even though the debates were contextualised within European culture, including Lyotard’s critique of Habermas’s insistence on the Enlightenment project, its influence went far beyond Europe. The influence of his concept of the postmodern – through global technological expansion, including the translation, publication and circulation of Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* – has already betrayed its intention as a European project. On the occasion of the exhibition, Lyotard organized a teleconference to show how time and space are traversed by the new material (later we will see that it is the *immaterial*), with representatives from Japan and Brazil, as well as Canada, the USA, and France. One can postulate that Lyotard already had on his mind the technological globalisation which is the reason why

3 Lyotard analyses the etymological root *mât* in terms of referent (*matière*), hardware (*matériel*), support (*matériau*), matrix (*matrice*), maternity (*maternité*).

postmodern discourse is no longer limited to Europe but extends around the globe. If this is the case, then we have to consider: What does it mean when countries adopt the postmodern without having been modern, as for example in the case of China, which some French thinkers consider to be a country of modernisation but not modernity? After the postmodern of Lyotard, and further through Frederic Jameson, we can indeed see an intensive discourse on the postmodern question in China. However, in China at least, these debates have not gone beyond aesthetics and narrations in literature. It seems to me that, besides its aesthetic value, which presented a sort of *Zeitgeist*, the postmodern question has still not really been tackled, and that further inquiries are needed.

Lyotard often referred the concept of the Other (or one of these Others) to the thirteenth-century Japanese Zen master, Dôgen, as a reference and mirror by which the *différend* within the European *logos* can be reflected. In fact, Dôgen was probably one of the key inspirations for the new metaphysics which Lyotard spoke of during the preparation of the *Les Immatériaux*, in order to articulate a new relation between matter and time, and hence anamnesis. The question of matter is firstly expressed in the original title of the exhibition project itself, which was *Les nouveaux matériaux et la création* [New Materials and Creation]. The “immatériaux” are not immaterial, but rather a new form of material brought about by telecommunication technologies. The new form of material turned against the modern project which produced it and created a rupture with it. It may not be appropriate to say that the postmodern was an epochal change that suddenly broke away from the modern; rather, the possibility of the postmodern was always already there *within* modern thought, as Lyotard himself wrote in *The Postmodern Condition*: “A work can become modern only if it is firstly postmodern, in the current state, and this state is constant.”<sup>4</sup> For example, for Lyotard, Denis Diderot’s *grand salon* or Michel de Montaigne’s prose are already postmodern. The changes in the material condition due to technoscientific discoveries and inventions have amplified this mode of thinking and narration. Hence, we can say that the postmodern is the result of an amplification, and the theme that is at centre of Lyotard’s exhibition is both material and figurative.

This process of amplification has also brought about structural transformations across all domains concerning knowledge. In this new material condition, the meaning of creation has significantly changed. Lyotard prefers to understand the relation between humans and things not as creation, in the sense of a subject creating its world, “for the purposes of the provisions of this

4 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 79.



world and enjoyment of this world, enjoyment of knowledge, power".<sup>5</sup> On the contrary, this new materiality has put an end to this anthropocentrism.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, Lyotard preferred to conceptualise the new matter as *interaction* rather than creation. This, I suspect, is also one of the reasons why the word "creation" was removed from the exhibition title. This reconceptualisation demands a new metaphysics which reconfigures the sense of being, and fundamentally transforms the concept of human existence. Lyotard says:

If you say creation, that means that you prohibit the other metaphysics that I evoked earlier: a metaphysics in which, precisely, man is not a subject facing the world of objects, but only – and this "only" seems to me to be very important – only a sort of synapse, a sort of interactive clicking together of the complicated interface between fields wherein flow the elements of particles via channels of waves.<sup>7</sup>

What does Lyotard mean by "interaction" here? He does not mean that the human interacts with objects rather than creating them like being in a dialogue – Lyotard went much further; interaction signifies an ontology of the transmission of a message without end, in which "man himself is not the origin of messages, but sometimes the receiver, sometimes the referent, sometimes a code, sometimes a support for the message; and where sometimes he himself is the message. This plasticity of humans means that this structure of communication today seems like something upon which identities can no longer be fixed."<sup>8</sup> This metaphysics cannot be found in the thought of Descartes, said Lyotard, but it would be possible to think through Spinoza, or Zen Buddhism – though not, he added, Zen as understood in California, but rather the Zen of the Chinese tradition, as incarnated by a great Japanese philosopher living in China, who is called ...".<sup>9</sup> Even though the name is missing in this report (*Après six mois de travail...*), we will see later that it is Dôgen.

In *Après six mois de travail...*, Lyotard only told half of the story about Dôgen, to explain the conceptualisation of being in terms of interaction instead of creation. Creation is the question that was posed at the beginning of the European tradition, and during medieval times; creation is the point where Christian theology and Aristotelian metaphysics merge, which in turn founds what Heidegger called "ontotheology". Lyotard told the second half of the story about Dôgen in a talk invited by Bernard Stiegler on the occasion of a

5 Jean-François Lyotard, *Après six mois de travail...*, 1984, Archive du Centre Pompidou, translated as "After Six Months of Work ...", in this volume, p. 36 ("à des fins de dispositions de ce monde et de jouissance de ce monde, jouissance de savoir, de pouvoir").

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., p. 37.

9 Ibid.

colloquium at IRCAM of the Centre Pompidou in 1986, later published as "*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*".

However, let us step back and ask: Why is the question of anamnesis so important for Lyotard, and how does it relate to the new technologies he witnessed in the 1980s?

## On the Senses of Anamnesis

The question posed by Lyotard that was quoted at the beginning of this article was directed to Bernard Stiegler, the philosopher of anamnesis. Lyotard was the supervisor of Stiegler's master's degree thesis at that time, and thus understood very well the work of the young philosopher who later dedicated three volumes of *Technics and Time* to anamnesis. Although there is no record of this discussion, it seems intriguing that the question has still not yet been answered in a satisfactory manner, at least not in the contemporary literature that I can find. In order to understand the complexity of Lyotard's question on anamnesis, and our ambition to understand the meaning of the *Les Imm-matériaux* outside of the European context, we will need to revisit the concept of anamnesis in Plato, Stiegler's take on Plato, Freud, and Lyotard's take on Freud.

### The Platonic Concept of Anamnesis

Anamnesis plays an important role in the Platonic system of knowledge, understood as the path towards truth. Plato's writing on this role of anamnesis is clearly expressed in both the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*, where he formulated the concept as a response to the challenge from the Sophists. Let us reformulate the Sophists' challenge in this way: If you know what virtue is (in the *Meno*), or what being appropriate is (in the *Phaedo*), then you don't really need to pursue it, since it is already in you; if you don't know what it is, then you won't be able to recognize it or conduct yourself according to it. This is a paradox which leads to the conclusion that one can never find the true knowledge or the ultimate good. Plato solved this paradox by saying: one does in fact know it, and indeed one does in fact know it, and indeed has always known it. The soul is immortal, said Plato, but in each incarnation, the soul forgets everything. However, forgetting doesn't mean that one cannot recognize the virtue that one is after. Forgetting is the condition of recognizing, and recollection – anamnesis – the method. The relation between truth and anamnesis is thus established. Socrates and Plato are not teachers in the sense of giving knowledge to students, but rather, as Plato said, spiritual midwives who help the students to recollect what has been forgotten. Hence, in the *Meno*, with the help of Socrates, the slave-boy learns to solve some geometrical questions despite having no prior knowledge of the matter. Recollection is not

only about recollecting a certain fact or principle, but rather a process of recovering the wholeness of knowledge. In the *Meno* (81c-d), Plato stated:

Since all nature is akin (*συγγενής*), and the soul has learnt all things, there is nothing to prevent her, by recollecting one single thing, recovering all the rest.<sup>10</sup>

One can notice that there is a kind of logical inference in Plato's concept of the anamnesis, but how does it work? One interpretation is that it functions on the basis of the Platonic Idea, like a sort of *a priori* concept which allows such an inference to happen.<sup>11</sup> This *a priori*, however, is not what we understand in the Kantian sense of the term. The Platonic Idea follows rather Parmenides's the *One*, in which thinking (the intellect) and being find their unity. However, Plato detaches the Idea from the particulars through his concept of the *chōrismós*, or separation. This separation is also one that removes the Idea from matter, that is to say truth from any material condition. This concept of separation was reproached by Aristotle, since the Platonic doctrine disregards the reality of the particular. Aristotle wants to reintegrate matter into his doctrine of being. The Platonic Idea which corresponds to the Aristotelian concept of form (*eidos*) becomes the first of the four causalities that Aristotle outlined in his *Metaphysics* Book V: *causa formalis*, *causa materialis*, *causa efficiens*, and *causa finalis*.

The re-inscription of matter becomes an important philosophical task for the tradition of European philosophy, including in modern philosophy, where we find attempts to unify the body and the soul in the doctrines of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz. To situate anamnesis in our discussion, I would like to refer to the reading of Plato by Bernard Stiegler. Stiegler has deconstructed the example given by Plato in *Meno*, since Plato has forgotten the tool that Socrates used to demonstrate these geometrical questions, which was drawing on the sand. For Stiegler, technics constitutes a crucial role in the concept of anamnesis, for anamnesis is not possible without a support that is outside the noetic soul. Stiegler hence proposes a retentional system that characterises the processes of anamnesis through a reading of Husserl's phenomenology of time-consciousness: primary retention (impression, association), secondary retention (memory, recognition) and tertiary retention (exteriorised memory). Within this system, the retentions constitute a cycle of mutual determination, meaning that the tertiary retentions condition the selection of the primary retention, which in turn conditions the recognition of the secondary retention, and so on. Later, I will show how this reading of technics and time, as a path towards truth (either in the sense of the Greek word *alētheia* or in contemporary senses), demonstrates a discrepancy

10 Reginald Edgar Allen, "Anamnesis in Plato's *Meno* and *Phaedo*", *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Sept. 1959), p. 167.

11 Ibid. I will argue against this assertion.

between the philosophical West and the philosophical East. The examination of this discrepancy will provide us with a new perspective from which to look at the postmodern turn.

### The Freudian Concept of Anamnesis

The relations between matter and time, according to Lyotard, can be grasped in three different temporal syntheses: those of habit, remembrance and anamnesis. Habit is a synthesis that expresses itself bodily. Remembrance always searches for a narrative with an origin, or a beginning. Anamnesis, for Lyotard, means something rather different and must be carefully distinguished from remembrance. This distinction has its source in Freud, especially his 1914 essay *Erinnern, Wiederholen und Durcharbeiten*. In this essay Freud tried to show that there are two techniques of analysis, one through hypnosis, which helps the patient to reconstruct the unconsciousness in a simple form of remembering – simple in the sense that the patient is removed from the present, and what matters is the earlier situation. Freud added a second scenario in which “no memory can as a rule be recovered”.<sup>12</sup> This occurs, for example, with some experiences of childhood which we didn’t understand at the time, but which disclose themselves subsequently. The biggest difference between the technique of remembrance in hypnosis and the technique of uncovering repetition is that in the latter the patient “reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it”.<sup>13</sup> The analyst’s task in this case is to help the patient to uncover the source of the resistance. However, as Freud identified, there are two difficulties here: the first is that the patient refuses to think there is a problem, that is to say, he or she refuses to remember; the second is that novice analysts often found that, even after revealing this resistance to the patient, there was no change. At this point, Freud introduces the third term, *Durcharbeiten* or “working-through”:

One must allow the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to *work through* it, to overcome it, by continuing, in defiance of it, the analytic work according to the fundamental rule of analysis.<sup>14</sup>

In the lecture “*Logos, Techne, or Telegraphy*” (1986), Lyotard commented on Stiegler’s retentive model of memory by referring to three type of memories: namely, bleaching (*frayage*), scanning (*balayage*) and passing (*passage*), corresponding respectively to habit, remembrance and anamnesis.

12 Sigmund Freud, *Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through*, in vol. 12 of Standard Edition (1950), p. 149.

13 Ibid., p. 150.

14 Ibid., p. 155.

Lyotard identifies Freud's *Durcharbeiten* with the third type of synthesis of time – anamnesis. Lyotard's reading of *Durcharbeiten* is, as we will see below, quite different from that of Freud.<sup>15</sup> For Lyotard, this anamnesis has two different senses, the nuances of which have to be carefully distinguished. The first sense of *Durcharbeiten* takes a form of free association: as Lyotard says, the passing takes more energy than scanning and bleaching, precisely because it doesn't have rules.<sup>16</sup> This sense is taken up on another occasion, in *Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, where he understands avant-gardism as a movement highly responsible for the presuppositions implied in modernity. The work of the modern painters from Manet to Duchamp or Barnett Newman, could be understood in terms of an anamnesis in the sense of psychoanalytic therapeutics:

Just as the patient tries to elaborate his present trouble by freely associating some apparently inconsistent elements with some past situation – allowing them to uncover hidden meanings in their lives and their behaviour – in the same way we can think of the work of Cézanne, Picasso, Delaunay, Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Malevich, and finally Duchamp as a working through (*Durcharbeiten*) performed by modernity on its own meaning.<sup>17</sup>

For Lyotard, these artists, including the avant-gardes, didn't represent a rupture from the modern, but rather an anamnesis of the modern. Hence post-modern art is a liberation from rules and responsibility, and a passing beyond the rules of inscription, through anamnesis. What is more interesting, and seems to be highly puzzling in Lyotard's thought, is the demand for something which is not inscribed and hence cannot be limited by the rules of writing. This origin is not something remembered, and indeed it is a memory which is not inscribed, but cannot be forgotten. One example is Freud's notion of the experience of childhood as something that is not remembered but that has to be worked through. Hence Christopher Fynsk proposed to emphasize the role of infancy in Lyotard's concept of anamnesis, noting that Lyotard "understood himself to be writing *from* an infancy and *to* an infancy".<sup>18</sup> It is not only that Lyotard has written two books, one *from* infancy (*Lectures d'Enfance*), the other *to* infancy (*Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*), but that deeply rooted in his

15 In the article by Scarfone Dominique, "À quoi œuvre l'analyse?", *Libres cahiers pour la psychanalyse* 1/2004 (N°9), 109–123, the author states that for Freud the *Durcharbeiten* is a task that comes back to the patient and the analyst can only wait to let things come along; for Lyotard, it is the contrary, meaning that it is the "third ear" (term taken from Nietzsche, *Ohren hinter den Ohren*) of the analyst, that should bring forth the *Durcharbeiten*, p. 116.

16 Lyotard, "Logos and *Techne*, or Telegraphy", p. 57.

17 Jean-François Lyotard, *Postmodern explained: correspondence, 1982–1985*, trans. Don Barry (Sydney: Power Publications, 1993), p. 79–80, translation modified.

18 Christopher Fynsk, "Lyotard's Infancy", in *Jean-François Lyotard: Time and Judgment*, *Yale French Studies*, No. 99, (2001), p. 48.

thought is, as Fynsk shows, the impulse of infancy becoming the condition of anamnesis, and hence of writing.

## Clear Mirror and the Negation of the Logos

I have no objection to such an interpretation of Lyotard's anamnesis, but I would like to complicate it. I would argue that anamnesis is present in Lyotard's writings at once as a technique – as we have seen above – but also as a logic – as I will now elaborate. In the text that we have started to analyse, in the section on anamnesis in which Lyotard dramatically talks about an example from Dôgen, Lyotard uses Dôgen to explain what he means by “passing”, or anamnesis. Here we can observe a nuance that I proposed before, concerning the use of the word anamnesis as *Durcharbeiten*. As Fynsk writes, “I believe that the appeal to Dôgen, here, is not merely an instance of exoticism, however effective it might also be on that score. It is rather an implicit acknowledgment that what he seeks to think does not surrender to the concept or to any theoretical exposition – that if there is a passage from infancy to thought, it is not established by the concept”. I would like to take this reference to Dôgen more seriously than Fynsk does; indeed, references to Dôgen do not only appear once in Lyotard's writings, but also appear in various notes and interviews.

I want to propose that what Lyotard was thinking was much more intriguing, and even something more uncanny, than Fynsk describes. I call this logic the *negation of logos*. The word “negation” is perhaps not correct, or doesn't carry the right sense. The negation at stake here is not a total negation nor a partial probation (e.g. part, intensity). The difference between privation and negation has to be clarified first. Let us paraphrase Heidegger's funny example of skiing to clarify the difference between privation and negation as understood by the Greeks.<sup>19</sup> When I am asked if I have time for skiing, I reply, “no, I don't have time”. In fact, I do have time, but I don't have time for *you*. The negation that I want to demonstrate here is not that being is negated in taking a reverse direction, but rather that it is “privated” in such a way that the direction is diverted. The first case is exemplified in the movement from modern to postmodern. The postmodern is the self-negation of the modern. It is not that, at a certain moment of modernity, something happened, and then we have the postmodern. It means rather that, at some moment of its development, the logic of modernity turned against itself and changed its direction. This negation as privation coming out of internal development is a neologism

19 Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*, ed. Medard Boss (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p. 46–47. Heidegger writes: “It took Greek thinkers two hundred years to discover the idea of privation. Only Plato discovered this negation as privation and discussed it in his dialogue *The Sophist*.”

presented by Lyotard in his introduction to *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>20</sup> The reference to Dōgen seeks to demonstrate the same logic, but no longer limited to the case of modernity, but rather to the *logos* as a whole. I believe that here lies Lyotard's ultimate question on technics – which, however, remains ambiguous. Lyotard attempted to compare what he means by anamnesis with what Dōgen calls “a clear mirror” in *Shōbōgenzō*, the classic of Zen Buddhism. I will quote at length the comment from Lyotard, in order to make clear what he thinks about it. Let's look closely at Lyotard's discussion on Dōgen:

It makes sense to try to recall something (let's call it something) which has not been inscribed if the inscription of this something *broke* the support of the writing or the memory. I am borrowing this metaphor of the mirror from one of the treatises of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, the *Zenki*, there can be a presence that the mirror cannot reflect, but that breaks it into smithereens. A foreigner or a Chinese can come before the mirror and their image appears in it. But if what Dōgen calls “a clear mirror” faces the mirror, then “everything will break into smithereens”. And Dōgen goes on to make this clear: “Do not imagine that there is first the time in which the breaking has not yet happened, nor that there is then the time in which everything breaks. There is just the breaking.” So there is a breaking presence which is never inscribed nor memorable. It does not appear. It is not a forgotten inscription, it doesn't have its place and time on the support of inscriptions, in the reflecting mirror. It remains unknown to the breachings and scannings.<sup>21</sup>

This passage seems to me the most puzzling part of Lyotard's intervention. The mirror and clear mirror seem to have a lot of metaphorical connotations. As a kind of dialogue between a twentieth-century French philosopher and a thirteenth-century Japanese monk, it is very difficult for us to analyse this statement without going into any kind of exoticism. The clear mirror is not a mirror; rather, it is one possibility of the mind, before which nothing exists as what it is: things can exist or not exist. The clear mirror presents something almost opposite to any conceptualisation of substance, since it is mere emptiness. Firstly, the clear mirror negates the substance or essence (*ousia*) as *eidos*. Hence, there hasn't been any event that breaks the mirror and marks the beginning. In front of a clear mirror, there is only constant breaking, which destroys the concept of the self (the self cannot be mirrored at all). So a Chinese person can see himself, since he still has *upādāna* (clinging, grasping, attachment), which is a desire towards representation. In contrast, a clear mirror sees everything broken, since in-itself it is empty. Lyotard further wrote that “I am not sure that the West – the philosophical West – has succeeded

20 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Deuxième état des immatériaux*, Mars 1984, Archive du Centre Pompidou.

21 Lyotard, “*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*”, p. 55.

in thinking this, by the very fact of its technological vocation."<sup>22</sup> Plato didn't succeed with his concept of *agathon*, or "being beyond essence"; Freud tried with his concept of "originary repression" (*Urverdrängung*); and Heidegger tried with his metaphor of "the clearing" (*die Lichtung*), but he ignored the violence of it.

Lyotard transforms the "clear mirror" into a question of writing, that is also a question of the *logos*. Here we come across another meaning of substance, which is the support, the *hypokeimenon*. The question is: can being [*ens*] be without being carried in the *hypokeimenon*? Or, as Lyotard asked in the first article of the *Inhuman*, "can thought go on without a body?" Can *logos* facilitate an anamnesis that is not inscribed by it? In other words, can *logos* – and, here, *techno-logos* – instead of determining the anamnesis, rather allow it to arrive in a non-deterministic way? This question is very speculative, and far too difficult to be answered in one article (indeed, it may take several generations to make it clear whether or not this question in itself is a valid one). Lyotard hopes to *move away from the logos through the logos*, such as was demonstrated in the postmodern turn. In the teaching of Dôgen, there is another similar passage that demonstrates this logic. The Zen master teaches "*Think of not-thinking*. How do you think of not-thinking? Non-thinking. This is the essential art of zazen."<sup>23</sup> *Zazen* or *tso-ch'an*, literally means "sitting Zen", and is a technique of meditation. The opposition that Dôgen created is thinking and not-thinking. This is a pure negation, since thinking cannot be not-thinking, and not-thinking cannot be thinking. But between thinking (*shiryô*) and not-thinking (*fushiryô*), there is a third way which is non-thinking (*hishiryô*); it negates both thinking and not-thinking, through the privation of thinking. The *non-* is the Other. This negation of the *logos* diverts itself towards something else, and there Lyotard finds in Dôgen the Other which is not inscribed in the *logos*. Lyotard was in favour of this logic. In a talk given at a colloquium on the occasion of the opening of an exhibition of the work of artist Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, later published as *Anamnesis of the Visible*, Lyotard described her work as "*I remember that I no longer remember*".<sup>24</sup> We can probably say that this double-bind is the logic of anamnesis: Is the non-logos possible through the negation of *logos* within *logos*? In the last paragraph of the article, Lyotard raised the question that we cited at the beginning of this text:

The whole question is this: is the passage possible, *will it be possible with, or allowed by*, the new mode of inscription and memoration that characterizes the new technologies? Do they not impose syntheses, and

22 Ibid., p. 55.

23 Carl Olson, *Zen and the Art of Postmodern Philosophy: Two Paths of Liberation From the Representational Mode of Thinking* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 68.

24 Jean-François Lyotard, "Anamnesis: Of the Visible", in *Theory Culture and Society* 2004, No. 21, p. 118.



syntheses conceived still more intimately in the soul than any earlier technology has done?<sup>25</sup>

Lyotard asked what kinds of new possibilities could be opened up by this new technology, towards the unknown. Or, in contrast, he asked whether the new technology is only in favour of a synthesis which is even more efficient and hegemonic, e.g. automation. I believe that this is Lyotard's central question, and it was present throughout his preparation for *Les Immatériaux*. The question was posed to the philosophers of writing, or of *mnemotechnics*. The task of this article, in its most ambitious sense, is to question whether it is a valid question. The *logos* is confronted with the clear mirror, in order to think whether it is possible to realize the clear mirror with the *techno-logos*. If we only think from this perspective, the postmodern will remain only a European project, and hence the discourse of globalisation, of the "common time",<sup>26</sup> is no more than a pretext. There is no easy way to evaluate this question without going back to the Other, from where the clear mirror comes, and where the *différend* happens. It needs courage to bring in something exotic, and I think Lyotard did it, with best intentions, to think with the *différend*, a space opened up between European culture and Japanese Zen Buddhism. But in order to understand the *différend*, one has to analyse the regime of phrases (which defines the intentions, descriptive, prescriptive or interrogative) and the genre of discourses (which defines the rules) of the Other. Unfortunately, this analysis is yet to be elaborated.

## Clear Mirror Confronts the Logos

Lyotard was right to relate the clear mirror to Heidegger's "clearing" or *Lichtung*, but I think it is not *Lichtung per se*, but rather *Gelassenheit* which prepares for the coming of the clearing. *Gelassenheit*, for Heidegger, is the question of privation. However, there is a fundamental difference between the system of *Gelassenheit* and the system of the *clear mirror*. The Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han, in his book *Shanzhai: Dekonstruktion auf Chinesisch*, makes an interesting observation in which he shows that the "path", or the *tao*, is different from the *Weg* of Heidegger, since for the former there is no creation but only de-creation (*Ent-schöpfung*), regardless of its origin;<sup>27</sup> while for the latter, it is always a search of an origin, since this search is the condition under which the forgetting brought about by ontotheology might be recognised as such, and thereby overcome. It would be too quick to equate *tao* with *clear mirror*, since Taoism and Buddhism stand as two distinct traditions within China. However, it is not a distortion to show that the *Ent-schöpfung* sets up a common ground for cultures that unite different religious

25 Lyotard, "Logos and *Techne*, or Telegraphy", p. 57 (italics added).

26 Ibid., p. 47.

27 Byung-Chul Han, *Shanzhai: Dekonstruktion auf Chinesisch* (Berlin: Merve, 2011).

thoughts. Again, the *Ent-schöpfung* that I borrow from Han is not opposed to creation (*Schöpfung*) as destruction; *ent-* stands not for negation but rather *privation*.

When we deal with two forms of knowledge (let's follow Lyotard in speaking of the philosophical "West" and the philosophical "East"), we always risk simplifying them, but in order to have a dialogue (if this is possible at all), it is hard not to simplify them as two systems. A dialogue needs a common ground, and the search for a common ground is always a privation. I can here only give a quick sketch of the reflections of two major Chinese and Japanese thinkers, and I will have to find another occasion to give a detailed account. For now, I will allow myself some shortcuts by placing it within the Kantian framework, as was already proposed by the Chinese philosopher Mou Zongsan. Mou is one of the most important figures of the new Confucianism, and arguably the only one in the twentieth century who understood both Western and Chinese philosophy. A specialist in Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, as well as the translator of the three *Critiques* of Immanuel Kant, Mou understands the difference between the West and the East within Kant's framework: in a rather simplified sense, one concerns a knowledge that, constrained by the receptivity of sensible intuition and the categories of the understanding, is confined to phenomena; the other concerns an *intellectual intuition* that concerns the experience which goes beyond the phenomenon towards what Kant calls the noumenon. Mou writes:

According to Kant, intellectual intuition belongs only to God, but not to humans. I think this is really astonishing. I reflect on Chinese philosophy, and if one follows the thought of Kant, I think that Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism all confirm that humans have intellectual intuition; otherwise it wouldn't be possible to become a saint, buddha, or *Zhenren*.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the intellectual intuition conceptualized by Mou is one that looks neither for scientific knowledge nor history (an origin qua difference), but to a sensibility in which everything reflects a non-phenomenal world: entering the thing-in-itself (no matter what it is, but probably not yet possible with a computer). The desire to enter the noumenon is characterised by distancing from substance as both *hypokeimenon* and *eidos*, from physics to metaphysics. This line of thought is further pursued by the Japanese philosopher Keiji Nishitani, who studied under Heidegger, and was also a successor of Kitarō Nishida, an important figure of the Kyoto School. During the 1980s, Nishitani held several discourses in different temples in Japan, discussing modernisation and Buddhism, and later published them as a book with the title *On Buddhism*. Astonishingly, Nishitani claimed that the concept of the historical

28 Mou Zongsan, *Phenomenon and the Thing-in-itself* (《現象與物自身》) (Taiwan: Student Book, 1975), p. 5 (my translation). Zhenren is the Taoist spiritual master, who has become free and immortal.

does not exist in Asian culture. What he meant by historical is the awareness of situating oneself as a historical being, and the anamnesis of historical events that reconstruct a historicity, or *Geschichtlichkeit*:

I am sure that Buddhism falls short of such historical consciousness, at least to some extent. Generally speaking, something called “historical” exists no less in China than in India and Japan. But I have the impression that in these countries there has been no trace of seeing the world as history in the true sense of the word ... This way of thinking is somewhat different from an historical one, at least of the sort prevalent in the modern world.<sup>29</sup>

Nishitani further commented that such a concept of historicity is neglected in the mode of thinking proper to East Asia – that is, the search of the intellectual intuition, under different titles. I am not sure if we can understand the clear mirror as a kind of anamnesis, since it totally undermines the chronological notion of time. Nishitani, however, attributes the concept of historicity to the Christian tradition, without asking the question of anamnesis. A dialogue could be made between Nishitani and Bernard Stiegler. This historicity has to be retrieved through the anamnesis of writing, or technics, which Stiegler calls “the epochal double redoubling”, that is “(re)constituting a who, and thus historicity – if not History”.<sup>30</sup> Writing, as Stiegler further showed in the third volume of *Technics and Time: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise*, is the “spatialisation of the time of consciousness past and passing as *Weltgeschichtlichkeit*”.<sup>31</sup> Historicity is only possible through anamnesis with mnemotechnics, and for it to happen it demands an origin of some sort (or the default of origin). This line of thought on time and matter is not present in Asian cultures, as Nishitani explains:

the other aspect – namely, that it is historical and that being is time – is comparatively neglected. Or rather I should say, if the term “neglect” is a bit of an exaggeration, it is not sufficiently developed. This is attributable to the fact that Buddhism places emphasis on the negative inherent in the contention that time is somewhat transient and that this is a world of suffering. Buddhism seems to have failed to grasp that the world of time is a field in which something new emerges without interruption.<sup>32</sup>

29 Keiji Nishitani, *On Buddhism* (NewYork: SUNY, 2006), p. 40.

30 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, vol. 2 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 77.

31 Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time* vol. 3 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 56.

32 Keiji Nishitani, *On Buddhism*, p. 49–50.

"Time is transient."<sup>33</sup> However, this transient time has to be overcome in order to attain a status whereby being is constant.<sup>34</sup> In this status, time no longer has any meaning. Hence, following the Heideggerian motif, Nishitani observes that being has never been understood as time, and hence that a world history is not fully grasped in Asian culture. A question may be posed immediately: Isn't there also writing in East Asia; and indeed, weren't the Chinese the first to invent paper? The question can be answered in two ways. Firstly, there was a privation of the anamnesis of history in favour of an anamnesis of the clear mirror, meaning that there is a tendency in Eastern thought which ignores the question of support. Secondly, the technics of anamnesis of the West is not limited to history as records of events, but rather a mode of thinking which searches for an origin, no matter which one. The anamnesis of the clear mirror designates another conception of time and matter (support). We will see later how this contributed to the fact that the Orient was not able to resist the mnemotechnics of the Occident.

## Disorientation and Dis-orientation

It is only within the analysis of the discourse of the Other that one can define the *différend*. The postmodern for Lyotard is a disorientation that challenges the authority to announce something childish. A typical example of the modern gaze is when Descartes criticised the city building in Paris, arguing that it was not well planned and hence seemed like a children's game. This disorientation has a double sense, as a liberation from the modern, from the responsibility and projects intrinsic to the modern; yet it is also a melancholia, since the *post-* is the search for an anamnesis which has not yet arrived, and hence constitutes its very questioning. But before this question can be reposed and reformulated, it is necessary to see another type of dis-orientation, in which the clear mirror confronts the *techno-logos* in material terms and substantial forms in what was once called *colonisation* and *imperialism*, and now *globalisation*.

I allow myself to briefly summarise a historical moment after the Opium Wars. When China realised its incompetence in warfare, it immediately adopted Western technology, science and democracy, which totally rewrote the conception of time. After the Opium Wars (1839–1842, 1856–1860), China recognized that it would be impossible to win any war without developing Western technologies. The serious defeats it suffered led to the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861–1895), which extensively modernized the

33 Ibid., p. 49.

34 I use the word "constant" by making allusion to François Jullien's distinction between eternal (Christian theological perception) and constant (Chinese perception) as the coordinate system of time; see Jullien, *Du temps – éléments d'une philosophie de vivre* (Paris: Livre de poche, 2012).

military, industrialized production, and reformed the education system. Two slogans came out of the movement which fully characterize the spirit of the time. The first one is, “learning from the West to overcome the West” (师夷长技以制夷); the second one bears a more cultural and nationalist spirit: “Chinese learning for fundamental principles and Western learning for practical application” (中学为体, 西学为用). Western technology produced hype in China, but more fundamentally, it produced fear. We can recall the example of the first railway in China, from Shanghai to Woosung, built by the English company Jardine, Matheson & Co. around 1876-1877. The railway led to so much fear (in terms of security and potential accidents), that the Ching Dynasty paid 285,000 taels of silver to buy the railway and destroy it.<sup>35</sup> Such moments of the transformation of cultures, which some Asian scholars tend to ambiguously call “modernisation” or “a different modernity”, is indeed very modern, since it is absolutely Cartesian, in the sense that one holds that the core philosophical thought can sustain and transform the material condition.

The second reflection on technoscience as well as democracy came after the 1911 revolution in China, when those who had been sent abroad as children later became such intellectuals.. One of the most important intellectual movements, now known as the *May Fourth Movement*, erupted in 1919. During the 1920s and 30s, Western philosophy started to flourish in China. Three names are closely related to the contemporary intellectual history of China: William James, Henri Bergson and Bertrand Russell (note that in fact none of these philosophers are specialists in technics). The intellectual debates of the period concerned whether or not China should be fully Westernised and fully adopt Western science, technologies and democracy, as supported by intellectuals such as Hu Shi (a student of John Dewey), and (on the opposite side) criticised by Carsun Chang Chia-sen (a student of Rudolf Eucken), Chang Tung-sun (the Chinese translator of Bergson in the 1920s) and others. These debates, however, led to unresolved questions and uncompromising propositions. Some intellectuals started to realise the mistake of the Cartesian binary opposition between the mind and the instrument, expressed in the earlier conception of the relation between Chinese and Western cultures. These debates ultimately did not go beyond either the affirmation of a modernized China (which included the alphabetisation of Chinese writing), or the insistence upon the values of life in traditional thought that resonate with the metaphysics of Eucken and Bergson.

China was unable to go further because of a lack of understanding of technics. The intellectuals of the generation of Mou Zhongsan saw their ultimate task as one of absorbing Christianity into Chinese culture. Technics has never constituted the core question of Chinese philosophy or Chinese culture. One

35 Sun, Kuang-Teh, *Late Ching Tradition and Debates around Westernisation* (Taiwan: Commercial Press, 1982) 孫廣德, *晚清傳統與西化的爭論* (台灣: 商務印書館, 1982) .

can also say like Stiegler that, in the West, the question of prosthesis – that is also the question of technics as anamnesis – didn't come to light until recent centuries. But the *techno-logos* is always there, acting like the unconscious, or the *Nachträglichkeit* of Freud, which designates at once a deferred action and also a supplement (*Nachtrag*). The effectuation of technics depends largely on the adoption and adaptation which is limited by culture. An ethnic group adopts technics from another to internalise it (such as China has done to the peripheral countries), or adapts itself to others' technics and becomes subordinated to them. Culture here acts as a stabiliser of technics, either limiting it or promoting it. However, following the sixteenth century Chinese culture did not have the tendency to advance its own technics, which did not happen until the nineteenth century, when it was forced to adopt Western science and democracy. The situation is different in Japan, which had the consciousness of "overcoming modernity" before China started on the path to modernisation. We can speculate that this may be the reason why Nishitani had the *sensibility* to discover the problem of time in Asian culture. In comparison with the disorientation of the postmodern, what we have seen above is a disorientation in a double sense, which is not only the loss of direction, but also the ability of identification. What is left would only be a politics of identity – the Orient is no longer oriented, but dis-oriented.

### The *Nachträglichkeit* of *Les Immatériaux*

Now we see the *différend*, but it remains virtual, since a dialogue – rather than a set of speculations – is yet to be initiated. The distance of 30 years since *Les Immatériaux* provides the occasion for posing this question again, or for questioning the question. The initiative of organising an event on Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux* was itself a *Nachträglichkeit*. Firstly, there was the shock that I experienced when I came across the work of Nishitani and Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time 2: Disorientation* in 2009, when it seemed to me that the question of a dialogue between the West and the East based on the question of technics had remained unanswered, and indeed almost untouched, for a century. Secondly, Lyotard's question was deferred, and hence has to be added, *nachgetragen*. It is deferred in the sense that his question was not intelligible to his contemporaries – or at least, in his own words, remained "too dialectical to take seriously".<sup>36</sup> It is these two *Nachträglichkeiten* that urge us to go back to some questions posed by Lyotard both during the preparation (including his treatise on Kant and Wittgenstein *Le Différend*) and right after the exhibition (including *L'inhumain* and *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*), questions which concerns the radical opening brought by modern technologies and the speculation on their new possibilities for both the philosophical "West" and "East". I tried to approach this intersection of the

36 Lyotard, "Logos and *Techné*, or Telegraphy", p. 57.

*Nachträglichkeiten* with the question that I posed at the very beginning of this article: namely, whether the postmodern is a European project. It may be a European project, but it shouldn't be a European project; and indeed, it should serve the occasion for a profound and speculative reflection. No matter how speculative is the question that Lyotard posed, which we cited at the opening of this article, it proposes to radically reflect upon both technological progress and the need to transform it by first reconceptualising it (as we have seen in terms of a new metaphysics of interaction). Lyotard's speculation places its hope in the new materiality that one nowadays calls "digital". How serious is this hope, and in what way can one continue to hope?

### Qu'arrive-t-il?

Lyotard was very much aware of the dangers brought by telecommunication culture; as he wrote, "the question of a hegemonic teleculture is already posed";<sup>37</sup> and he endeavoured to contemplate this new condition and to search for a metaphysics which is both material and political. What lies behind the dis-orientation of the postmodern is a desire of a re-orientation, not only for the Orient, but also for the Occident, since the Occident exists in relation to the Orient, *le différent*. Arrive-t-il? Lyotard asked, "what does 'here' mean on the phone, on television, at the receiver of an electronic telescope? And the now? Does not the 'tele' element necessarily obscure the presence, the 'here-and-now' of the forms and their 'carnal' reception? What is a place, a moment, not anchored in the immediate 'suffer' of what happens [*arrive*]. Is a computer in any way here and now? Can anything happen [*arriver*] with it? Can anything happen to it?"<sup>38</sup> Lyotard recalls Heidegger's *Ereignis*, and the sublime of Kant, which manifests itself in this new material condition as a sort of philosophical resistance. The *arrive-t-il*, without subject, without content, is however always haunted by the question *qu'arrive-t-il*?

In Beijing in 2000, there was an exhibition entitled *Post-Material Interpretations of Everyday Life by Contemporary Chinese Artists*, which is said to have been influenced by Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>39</sup> The "post-material" in the title was not meant to indicate something spiritual, but rather, following Lyotard, a new form of materiality, for example genetic engineering, or artificial intelligence. At the end of the exhibition's curatorial statement, the curator Wang Zu wrote:

We know, due to the advancement of technology, that we are confronting the possibility of developing a new moral, and we will need to build a new structure of such a moral. Post-material, instead of saying that it

37 Ibid., p. 50.

38 Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Quelque chose comme: communication... sans communication," in *L'Inhumain: causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), p. 129.

39 Personal correspondence with Professor WangMingAn of the Beijing Capital Normal University.

describes the expansion of material and the decline of the human spirit, represents their opposition... We will have to create a new moral visuality, which redefines art, as well as life.<sup>40</sup>

The logic of this exhibition resembles Lyotard's. However, one will notice two *puncta* in this curatorial statement. Firstly, what is presented is an affirmation of the disorientation, which no longer distinguishes the West and the East. Technology becomes a global phenomenon and fundamental to everyday life. Should this not also be regarded as the problem of historicity that Nishitani lamented in the 1980s? Secondly, the statement refers to an opposition between the decline of spirit and the expansion of material, and hence calls for a new moral, which is fundamentally also a new logic.

In November 2002, the French philosopher Paul Virilio curated an exhibition entitled *Ce qui arrive* at the Fondation Cartier in Paris. In this exhibition, Virilio wanted to draw attention to catastrophes caused by technological development in the previous decades, and announced that a reversal of what Aristotle distinguished as substance and accidents had taken place. In light of the anticipation of the normalisation of catastrophes in the twenty-first century, Virilio hoped to go back to the question of responsibility and reflect on the problem of industrialisation, which becomes destructive to both corporal and spiritual beings. Virilio points out that, for Aristotle, accidents serve to reveal substance; in other words, substance is always accidental; hence what follows from accidents are new inventions. Accidents are somewhat necessary, since without them there can be no technological development. But the great discoveries, according to Virilio, also create the great catastrophes. Globalisation, through *techno-logos* (and through philosophy), is also a process of the production of a catastrophe at the scale of nature:

and so it is merely high time that ecological approaches to the various forms of pollution of the biosphere are finally supplemented by an eschatological approach to technical progress, to this finiteness without which dear old globalisation itself risks becoming a life-size catastrophe.<sup>41</sup>

Virilio condemned the Enlightenment's notion of progress, and the idea that the Orient cannot escape from the progress of the Occident. He quoted the French-Iranian philosopher Daryush Shayegan, who claimed that one cannot imagine cultures as separate blocks without interpenetration, and that hence *we are all Occidents*.<sup>42</sup> Virilio mocked Shayegan, claiming that to talk about "light coming from the Occident" and "a world which cannot escape progress" is ironic. It is here we see the value of talking about *le diffèrent*, and the

40 后物质：当代中国艺术家解读日常生活，北京红门画廊（21 Oct–30 Nov, 2000），<http://www.xu-ruotao.com/exhibitions/group-2/post-material-interpretation-of-everyday-life-by-contem-35> (my translation).

41 Paul Virilio, *The Original Accident*, trans. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 24.

42 Paul Virilio, *Ce qui arrive* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 89.



resistance to progress and the universalisation of the teleculture. Indeed, if it does not take the question of technics and anamnesis seriously, I am not sure whether the philosophical East can inspire the West any further than what Lyotard took from Dôgen.

### Re-orientation: an Anamnesic Resistance?

As the question of disorientation takes the new shape of a global disorientation, Heidegger's critique of technology seems to echo from time to time. In the dawn of the digital age, didn't we already see the return of the Californian Zen, which was once called Californian Ideology? What will be the difference that is to be shaped? I feel that after modernisation in Asia, these questions are no longer asked. Today if we take up the question by Lyotard, the task will be to look into the materiality of the digital and the new technological condition accompanied with it, in order to find a possibility that may preserve the *différend*, or even multiply the *différend*.

Lyotard was very brave to raise this question, which demands a new logic of thinking about technology, and a turning against technology in order to explore its possibility. It is no longer the logic that functions within machines, but rather a logic that liberates beings from such a strictly formalized thinking. Or maybe we can refer to what Socrates reveals in his challenge in the *Protagoras*, the *techné* of all *technai*, a thinking that governs all practical technics. Socrates has chosen reason, and set a beginning of Western philosophy separated from the pre-Socratic metaphysical thinking. But this reason, as we have seen in Lyotard's thinking, has to be problematized by introducing the Other, both a mirror and a clear mirror. The interaction model, for Lyotard, is the possibility of dismantling the constant *upādāna* of creation. If here the new materiality allows us to rethink the tradition of the philosophical West, it is equally significant for the philosophical East to rethink the question of anamnesis from another direction. In this sense, we may understand why Heidegger refuses to seek any solution in the East, as he says in the famous *Der Spiegel* interview "*Only a god can save us*":

my conviction is that only in the same place where the modern technical world took its origin can we also prepare a conversion [*Umkehr*] of it. In other words, this cannot happen by taking over Zen Buddhism or other Eastern experiences of the world. For this conversion of thought we need the help of the European tradition and a new appropriation of it. Thought will be transformed only through thought that has the same origin and determination.<sup>43</sup>

43 Martin Heidegger, "Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten", *Der Spiegel* 30 (Mai, 1976): 193–219. Trans. by W. Richardson as "Only a God Can Save Us" in *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (1981), ed. T. Sheehan, p. 45–67.

Here lies both the affinity and difference between Lyotard and Heidegger. Lyotard is more open to dialogue, to the radical possibility of the *différend*. Indeed, the reason to look for the *différend* is not to destroy the differences, but rather to recognize the “inevitable and inescapable possibility of heterogeneity”.<sup>44</sup> But how is this possible in the case of Lyotard, with his insistence on the Other? Lyotard gave a response to this question, and I think this will perhaps be the starting point for reflecting on a possible project of re-orientation through the practice of an anamnestic resistance. I summarise this response in terms of three points: *writing*, *origin* and *system*, though we have to bear in mind that such a summary may not really reflect the systematic thinking of Lyotard.

**WRITING.** Lyotard had difficulty providing an example of the new technology that he imagined, which can realize the potential of such anamnestic resistance. He writes: “The only thing I can see that can bear comparison with this a-technical or a-technological rule is writing”.<sup>45</sup> Writing also distinguishes the anamnesis of Lyotard from that of Freud, since Freud’s anamnesis is limited to free association, while for Lyotard it is the production of work. Anamnesis is originally an interminable process; however, in the case of psychoanalysis it is brought to an end when the treatment is complete; while in the case of artistic creation (including writing), the artists stop since labour is no longer indispensable. What marks the difference between these two ends is the work of the artists – which is also the mnemotechnics. Lyotard speculates on a passing which is not psychoanalytical, but rather a form of resistance against the *techno-logos*:

We envisage this writing as passing or anamnesis in both writers and artists (it’s clearly Cezanne’s working-through) as a resistance (in what I think is a non-psychoanalytical sense, more like that of Winston in Orwell’s *1984*) to the syntheses of breaching and scanning. A resistance to clever programmes and fat telegrams.<sup>46</sup>

Winston is further mentioned in the chapter entitled *Glose sur la résistance in Le Postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*. We recall that Winston decides to write a diary to express what he thinks and feels, as an act of rebellion. It will be interesting to ask: a rebellion against what, when the law doesn’t exist any more? Winston has no idea of the exact date. It is not the anamnesis of an historical event, but rather an act of resistance to the systematic stupidity of the Party. Lyotard turned to the examples of Benjamin’s micrology named by Adorno. In *One Way Street* and *Berlin Childhood*, what is presented is not the story of childhood, but rather the childhood of events; to put it in another way, what

44 Michel Olivier, “Le différent, ou la question de l’enchaînement”, in *Les Transformateurs Lyotard* (Paris: Édition Hermann, 2008), p. 211.

45 Lyotard, “Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy”, p. 56

46 Ibid.

is inscribed is the potential of infinitization instead of the completion of a history. The stories only inscribe their ungraspability.

The question of writing enabled by the new technology was one of the central themes of *Les Immatériaux*. Together with Thierry Chaput, Lyotard set up an experiment entitled *Épreuve d'écriture*, which was what one today calls collaborative writing, with Bruno Latour, Jacques Derrida, Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Isabelle Stengers and others, creating entries of keywords and commenting on each other's entries. Even though today, with the digital networks, we can write through blogging, social networking, audio-visual creation, coding and so on, a systematic programme on writing as resistance, aside from its journalistic value, still has to be thought through; not only a task for the intellectuals, as demonstrated in the *Épreuve d'écriture*, but also for the public.

*Origin.* The origin is the ungraspable. The philosophical East paid little attention to the relation between the origin and the support. The anamnesis of the origin for Lyotard is not a return to the origin that designates a place and date of an event, but rather the unknowable, which cannot be inscribed. Such an origin, however, has its support in writing; that is to say, the anamnesis can take place through writing, but also escapes being written. If anamnesis is like language, moving from one phrase to another, it needs chains (*enchaînement*) in order for it to reach the referent. The principle of the anamnesis, according to Lyotard, emphasises the fact that "'reason' for the chain is never presentable in terms of a past event (originary scene). It is immemorial".<sup>47</sup> The unknowable presents itself in the thing and the voice, which serve as calls, or rather as motifs, for the reconstruction of the lost origin.

In a lecture entitled *Philosophie et Origine* given to first year undergraduates at the Sorbonne in 1964, Lyotard started with a reflection on Hegel's first major philosophical work, the which marked his separation with Schelling and Fichte, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy* (1801). Hegel described the birth of philosophy as a response to the loss of the force of unification of human communities: "When the might of union vanishes from the life of men and the antitheses lose their living connection and reciprocity and gain independence, the need of philosophy arises."<sup>48</sup> Philosophy was born in order to retrieve the lost unity (this became even clearer in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, 1837). Philosophy is not history per se, which traces the happening of this event, but rather seeks to recover it from the present moment, writes Lyotard, "*the origin of philosophy is today*".<sup>49</sup> The origin escapes both writing and philosophy and serves as the condition of philosophizing,

47 Lyotard, "Anamnesis of the Visible", p. 109.

48 G. W. F. Hegel, *The difference between Fichte's and Schelling's system of philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and Walter Cerf (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1977), p. 91.

49 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Pourquoi philosophe?* (Paris: PUF, 2012), p. 61.

while the possibility of philosophizing resides in the act of writing and searching; on the other hand, the origin without support and its practice of anamnesis is also the source of the dis-orientation that we have described above.

*System.* Although Lyotard adopted Hegel's conception of the task of philosophy as the restoration of original unity, he moved away from Hegel's tendency towards systematisation (let us recall that Hegel stands as the most systematic of the German Idealists). The act of anamnesis is one of resistance against systematisation. Lyotard spoke of the system as what survived the ruins of the bourgeois world after the crisis of capitalism, two World Wars, and the extermination of European Jews.<sup>50</sup> Systematization, according to Lyotard, is the domination of humans and nature by reason. The politics of anamnesis is a politics that seeks the incalculable, something both of this reason and against it. Thirty years after *Les Immatériaux*, the new materiality described by Lyotard has not taken the direction that he envisaged, but rather has led to a new mode of reification and control, which Bernard Stiegler calls "hypermaterial". In China, the rapid adoption of technologies has led to a misery of pollution in all aspects: water, food, soil, and blood. Economic and technological progress today enjoys the speed of moving into the impossibility of anamnesis, of both the unknown and historicity. This consists in the necessity of resisting the smart programmes or fat telegrams. I hope that the elaboration of the *différend* concerning anamnesis in the two genres of discourse of the philosophical West and East, however, can become a supplement (*Nachtrag*) to each other. There is probably no better way to end this article than by citing the last sentence of Lyotard's "*Logos, Techne* or Telegraphy":

I'll stop on this vague hope, which is too dialectical to take seriously. All this remains to be thought out, tried out.<sup>51</sup>

50 Lyotard, "*Anamnesis of the Visible*", p. 117.

51 Lyotard, "*Logos and Techne, or Telegraphy*", p. 57.



# The Silence of God

Charlie Gere

In this chapter I take as my starting point Natalie Heinrich's description of the use of headphones in *Les Immatériaux*:

In the absence of a guided tour, visitors to *Les Immatériaux* had to wear earphones, through which they could hear human speech. The voices streaming through the earphones did not provide any direct "explanation" of what the visitor had in sight, but rather unidentified fragments of discourse indirectly related to what they were supposed to comment on, without requiring the visitor to press a button in front of each exhibit. Most visitors did not make the connection between the voices and their own movement through the exhibition, which inevitably led to some colourful misunderstandings ...<sup>1</sup>

The fragments in question were excerpts from literary and philosophical works by, among others, Blanchot and Beckett. The "earphones" or headsets, which were wirelessly controlled and supplied by Philips, kept breaking down (unsurprisingly given that the technology they embodied was then highly experimental). That, and the fact that the Pompidou both obliged visitors to use them and also charged for them, made their inclusion in the exhibition highly controversial.

Eight years after *Les Immatériaux* Lyotard gave a paper at the Collège Internationale de Philosophie in Paris, entitled "On a Hyphen",<sup>2</sup> about the apostle

1 Nathalie Heinrich, "Les Immatériaux Revisited: Innovation in Innovations". *Tate Papers* (online) 12. 2009. <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/les-immateriaux-revisited-innovation-innovations>.

2 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Hyphen: Between Judaism and Christianity* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 1999).

Paul, thus anticipating the recent revival of interest in him by over half a decade. In it he gave a reading of Paul as exemplary of the hyphen between the words “Judeo” and “Christian”. Among Lyotard’s concerns in this essay is that of “the Voice”. Lyotard contrasts the inaccessibility of God’s voice for the Jews with its manifestation in the incarnation of Christ. This can be understood, in part at least, as a means for Lyotard to work through some questions of language, in particular the Judaic paradigm of the absent letter and the Christian model of incarnated language. It is in this context that the discursive and audio experiments of *Les Immatériaux* can be understood, as articulations of the relationship between Judaism, ethics and the text.

Lyotard opens “On a Hyphen” by saying that he will be “speaking of a white space or blank [*blanc*], the one that is crossed out by the trait or line uniting Jew and Christian in the expression ‘Judeo-Christian’”.<sup>3</sup> Then, describing the Jewish experience of God, he continues: “The Voice leaves its letters without vowels voiced on desert stone. It leaves them to be pronounced by a people so that this people may rejoice in having been picked out by it”.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Voice, which is not temporal, obliges the people to “act these letters”. Lyotard understands this to be the basis upon which what Christians would call the Bible or Scripture is received. The Hebrew word for the Bible is *Miqra*, which means “convocation, reading, festive celebration”, and it is the “commandment to act by way of letters left by the Voice without history” that “destines the people who accepts and receives this commandment to a historicity without precedent in human cultures”.<sup>5</sup> In being destined thus, to a historicity that is both about what has happened, and about the temporal meaning and direction of that which has happened, the people find reality unfulfilled and therefore demand justice in everyday life.<sup>6</sup> Because the Voice is not in time, time is the time of death, the time of the withdrawal of the Voice; but it is also the time in which the people “are called together, called upon to voice, to raise their voices together, to read aloud, and to celebrate the letters of protection and of the promise”.<sup>7</sup> It is because Adam desired to speak the language of the Voice immediately, without suffering, complication or history, that he is expelled from Paradise, into historicity.<sup>8</sup> This historicity, however, is also a call “to act the letter of the Voice”, inasmuch as the letters promise Paradise.

In order to explain this, Lyotard turns to what he calls a “[t]raditional exegesis”, one that finds in the Hebrew word for “orchard”, *pardes*, from which we derive our word “paradise”, the model of the four ways in which the *Torah*, the first five books of the *Miqra* or *Tanakh* (or what Christians call the *Old Testament*),

3 Ibid., p. 13.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., p. 13–14.

8 Ibid., p. 14.

should be read: *P* stands for *peshat*, the literal meaning; *R* for *remez*, the allusive or allegorical meaning; *D* for *drash*, the meaning to be exacted, the moral meaning; and finally *S* for *sod*, the secret, hidden or inaccessible meaning.

It is by means of the presence of this unattainable meaning in the tradition of reading that the Voice remains withdrawn, no longer as death in time but as the perpetually desired.<sup>9</sup>

Lyotard suggests that Paradise is the fulfilment of the four meanings, but he also asks what it means to fulfil a meaning that is *sod*, posited as estranged?<sup>10</sup> It is at this point that he brings in St Paul – or, as he calls him, “Shaoul the Pharisee from Tarsus, a Roman citizen who goes by the name Paulus” – and through him unpacks the meaning of the hyphen in “Judeo-Christian”.<sup>11</sup> In effect, what Lyotard proposes is that “the mystery of the Cross” proclaimed by Paul sublates “the position ... that the reading of the letters by the people reserves for the Voice”.<sup>12</sup> Through Christ the Word is made flesh, and comes among us, and in doing so the “Voice voices itself by itself” and asks “not so much to be scrupulously examined, interpreted, understood, and acted, so as to make justice reign, but loved”. Thus “[t]he Incarnation is a gesture of love. The Voice that was in paradise banishes itself from this paradise and comes to live and die with the sons of Adam”.<sup>13</sup> The hyphen between “Judeo” and “Christian”, then, is the “mortification of the first by the dialectic of the second. The truth of the Jew is in the Christian”. “Christian breath” reanimates the dead Jew, who is otherwise left to his letter.<sup>14</sup>

The Incarnation “expressly disavows the flesh of letters”, and, because it is a mystery, it “exceeds the secret meaning, the *sod*, of the letter left by the invisible Voice”, as it is “the voiced Voice, the Voice made flesh”.<sup>15</sup> In the *Miqra*, the Voice can perform miracles, which act as signs for the people chosen by the Lord, who need signs. The Incarnation is not a miracle, however, but a mystery, which “destroys the regimen of every reading” and “offers nothing to be understood or interpreted”.<sup>16</sup> With Jesus “[t]he Voice is no longer deposited in traces ... no longer marks itself in absence ... is no longer to be deciphered through signs”.<sup>17</sup> “Reading is in vain” because “presence is real” in the Host,

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, p. 14–15.

12 Ibid, p. 15.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid, p. 22.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.



or in the experience of Doubting Thomas in putting his fingers in Christ's wounds".<sup>18</sup>

For Lyotard the dialectical sublation of the Jewish letter by the Christian Incarnation, in which the Voice voices, is ethically problematic. The Torah is not the Voice, but "its deposited letter" and the "language of the Other is not dead but estranged or foreign".<sup>19</sup> Thus "the grounds for ethics ... has to do with respecting this foreignness".<sup>20</sup> The other is always a letter that requires the risky and lengthy process of "decipherment, vocalization, cantillation, setting to rhythm, translation, and interpretation".<sup>21</sup> These are not incarnations of the Voice, and are subject to the interdiction against figuration, which is also an interdiction against incarnation, and against making the Voice speak directly and visibly.<sup>22</sup> The Incarnation is the revocation of foreignness, whereas ethics is only possible if foreignness is preserved. By contrast with the Incarnation, "it is enough to want what the Other wants to say, what the Other means, to desire what it desires, to live its loving me enough for me to lose the love of myself; it is enough to have this faith in order to be justified, before the letter of any reading".<sup>23</sup>

For Lyotard, the Christian dialectical sublation of the gap between Judaism and the Christianity necessitates the repression and forgetting of the former by the latter. Thus, for Lyotard, the "jews" (in lower case and plural) come to represent the outsider, the "other", who disrupts that which needs to be excised in order that the West can realize its dream of unbounded fulfilment and development. Thus, the Pauline dialectical move is part of the Western disavowal of heterogeneity and difference, a disavowal that will ultimately lead to Auschwitz.

It is with a discussion of Auschwitz that Lyotard begins his major work *The Differend*, which is also the book he had just completed when he started work on *Les Immatériaux*. Lyotard recounts Holocaust denier Robert Faurisson's claim that the gas chambers did not exist (on the grounds that there were no witnesses to their use) as an example of a *differend* inasmuch as the gas chambers' existence cannot be judged according to the standards of historical proof demanded by Faurisson.<sup>24</sup> There is a close connection between Lyotard's understanding of the impossibility of witnessing Auschwitz, and that of Giorgio Agamben, especially in the latter's book *Remnants of Auschwitz*, in which Agamben is also concerned with, among other things, the question of

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., p. 24.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, p. 25.

24 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

testimony.<sup>25</sup> *Remnants of Auschwitz* is possibly Agamben's most controversial book, in that in it the camp is understood as a paradigm of the contemporary biopolitical apparatus of the state. Perhaps even more troublingly, Agamben seems to ascribe a kind of Christ-like status to the figure of "the *Muselmann*" (literally: the Muslim), the camp inmate who has given up any form of resistance and is thus marked for imminent death. *Remnants of Auschwitz* also involves a working-through of Agamben's antinomianism, inasmuch as he sees attempts to understand the ethical dimensions of Auschwitz in legal terms as misguided. This antinomianism will find further expression in Agamben's own engagement with St Paul in *The Time That Remains*.<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to note the number of points at which Lyotard's points of reference intersect with or parallel those of Agamben, including not just Auschwitz and Paul, but also the question of the Voice, and even the Talmudic exegesis of Paradise, or *Pardes*, discussed by Lyotard and described earlier. Indeed it is with this analysis that Agamben begins his essay "Pardes: The Writing of Potentiality". He recounts a story from the Talmudic treatise *Hagigah* (or "Offering"), which goes as follows:

Four rabbis entered *Pardes*: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher, and Rabbi Akiba. Rabbi Akiba says, "When you reach the stones of pure marble, do not say: 'Water, Water!' For it has been said that *he who says what is false will not be placed before My eyes*." Ben Azzai cast a glance and died. Of him Scripture says: *precious to the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints*. Ben Zoma looked and went mad. Of him Scripture says: *have you found honey? Eat as much as you can, otherwise you will be full and you will vomit*. Aher cut the branches. Rabbi Akiba left unharmed.<sup>27</sup>

Agamben points out that "according to rabbinical tradition, *Pardes* ... signifies supreme knowledge", and in the *Kabbalah*, the *Shechinah* or "presence of God" is called "*Pardes ha-torah*, the paradise of the *Torah*, its fulfilled revelation", and the "entry of the four rabbis into *Pardes* is therefore a figure for access to supreme knowledge".<sup>28</sup> In this understanding, the cutting of the branches by Aher means the isolation of the *Shechinah* from the other *sefirot* – the attributes or words of God – and its comprehension as an autonomous power.<sup>29</sup> Inasmuch as the *Shechinah* is the last of the ten *sefirot*, by cutting the branches of the other *sefirot*, Aher separates the knowledge and revelation of God from other aspects of divinity.<sup>30</sup> This is identified with the sin of Adam,

25 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

26 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains: A Commentary on the Romans* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005).

27 Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).

28 Ibid., p. 206.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

who, rather than contemplating the totality of the *sefirot*, preferred to contemplate only the last one, and in doing so, separated the tree of knowledge from the tree of life.<sup>31</sup>

Agamben offers another interpretation, from Moses of Leon, author of the *Zohar*, the foundational work of the *Kabbalah*, which seems to be that also invoked by Lyotard in his essay on Paul. Moses suggests that the *aggadah* is a parable of the exegesis of the sacred text, and it is he who proposes the reading of the word *Pardes* in which *P* stands for *peshat*, the literal meaning; *R* to *remez*, the allusive or allegorical meaning; *D* for *drash*, the meaning to be exacted, the moral meaning; and finally *S* for *sod*, the secret, hidden or inaccessible meaning.<sup>32</sup> Therefore Ben Azzai, who dies, is the literal meaning; Ben Zoma, who goes mad, is the Talmudic sense, to be extracted; Aher, who cuts the branches, is the allegorical sense; and Rabbi Akiba, who enters and leaves unharmed, is the mystical sense. From this perspective Aher's sin involves "the moral risk implicit in every act of interpretation, in every confrontation with a text or discourse, whether human or divine".<sup>33</sup> The risk in question is that "speech, which is nothing other than the manifestation and unconcealment of something, may be separated from what it reveals and acquire an autonomous consistency".<sup>34</sup> Agamben continues:

The cutting of the branches is, therefore, an *experimentum linguae*, an experience of language that consists in separating speech both from the voice and pronunciation from its reference. A pure word isolated in itself, with neither voice nor referent, with its semantic value indefinitely suspended: this is the dwelling of Aher, the "Other," in Paradise. This is why he can neither perish in Paradise by adhering to meaning, like Ben Zoma and Ben Azzai, nor leave unharmed, like Rabbi Akiba. He fully experiences the exile of the Shechinah, that is, human language.<sup>35</sup>

The essay then goes on to suggest that the story of Aher, the "Other", is also a way of thinking about the work of Jacques Derrida.<sup>36</sup> For Agamben Derrida is Aher, the other, who cut the branches, and who remains still mired in metaphysics (and, by implication, Agamben himself is Rabbi Akiba). Jeffrey Librett suggests that Agamben sees Derrida as suffering from a "graphocentrism" as problematic as the logocentrism Derrida charges other philosophers with.<sup>37</sup> For Agamben philosophy is always already fixated on the "*gramma*", because the voice "even when it has been posited as origin, is always posited

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., p. 207.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 209.

37 Jeffrey S. Librett, "From the Sacrifice of the Letter to the Voice of Testimony: Giorgio Agamben's Fulfillment of Metaphysics." *Diacritics* 3 (2-3) (2007), p. 11-33.

as lost, as an origin that has already been replaced by the letter".<sup>38</sup> Libbett sees Agamben's "animus against the letter"<sup>39</sup> as "powerfully and explicitly overdetermined by Christian thinking, in the Pauline tradition, as the metaphysics that poses God qua logos by polemicizing, in favor of the living spirit (spirit as life), against the 'dead letter' of the law".<sup>40</sup> It is this that leads Agamben, in his book on St Paul, to criticize deconstruction as a "thwarted messianism" of "infinite deferment".<sup>41</sup>

Perhaps Agamben can be understood to be performing the very sublation and repression of the Jewish letter that Lyotard sees being undertaken by Paul. And perhaps *Les Immatériaux* can be understood as an attempt by Lyotard to resist this kind of sublation, in which the singular becomes a universal paradigm. Along with 25 or so other participants, including writers, philosophers and scientists, Derrida participated in an "experiment in collective, writings, interactive and at a distance, on microcomputers, equipped with word processing and communication software" that was launched two months before the exhibition opened. Each participant was lent an Olivetti M20, connected to the PTT network, and was asked to respond to a list of 50 words given to them by Lyotard. The results were then collated and made available to exhibition visitors on Olivetti M24 workstations, and also in the second of the two publications accompanying the exhibition, entitled *Epreuves d'écriture*.

Derrida remarks upon his participation in *Les Immatériaux* in his piece written on the occasion of Lyotard's death, "Lyotard and us". As is sometimes the case with Derrida, the essay is also a meditation on a phrase, in this case "there will be no mourning", which Derrida "extracted" from a piece of writing by Lyotard entitled "Notes du traducteur", or "Translator's Notes".<sup>42</sup> In this piece, written for a journal special issue dedicated to Derrida, Lyotard, in Derrida's words, "plays at responding to texts which I had, upon his request, written in 1984, for the great exhibition *Les Immatériaux*."<sup>43</sup> Declining the opportunity to say more about "the calculated randomness of this exhibition and the chance J.F.'s invitation opened for me, namely the perfect machinic occasion to learn, despite my previous reluctance, to use a word processing machine – thus setting on a dependence which lasts to this day", Derrida chooses instead to discuss what he calls a "minor debt" which at first "seems technical or machinic, but because of its techno-machinic effacement of singularity and thus of destinal unicity, you will see very soon its essential link with the sentence I had to begin with, the one which had already surrounded and taken

38 Ibid., p. 12.

39 Ibid., p. 12.

40 Ibid., p. 15.

41 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, p. 103.

42 Jacques Derrida, "Lyotard and us," *Parallax*, 6 (4) (2000), p. 28–48.

43 Ibid., p. 37.

over me, 'there shall be no mourning'".<sup>44</sup> Though Derrida and Lyotard had always used the formal "*vous*", in his text for the exhibition Derrida

played with a "*tu*" devoid of assignable addressee, taking away from the chance reader the possibility to decide whether that "*tu*" singularly addressed the receiving or reading instance, that is, whoever, in the public space of publication, happened to read it, or instead, what is altogether different, altogether other, this or that particular private if not cryptic addressee – the point of all these both sophisticated and naive procedures being, among others, to upset, sometimes frighten, at the limit, the limit itself, all borders, for instance those between private and public, singular and general or universal, intimate or inner and outer, etc. In doing so, I had pretended to challenge whosoever was addressed by this *tu* to translate the idiomatic phrasing of many of my sentences, to *translate* it into another language (interlinguistic translation, in Jakobson's terms), or even to translate it into the same language (intralinguistic translation), or even into another system of signs (music or painting, for instance: intersemiotic translation). Accordingly, after this or that sentence which I considered untranslatable, and after a period, I would regularly add the infinitive form of the ironic order or the imperative challenge: "*traduire*" / "translate".<sup>45</sup>

The challenge to translate that Derrida throws down in his texts for *Les Immatériaux* is what Lyotard responds to in his "Notes du traducteur". As Derrida puts it, Lyotard "seriously plays at imagining the notes of a virtual translator. He does so under four headings which I will only mention, leaving you to read these eight pages worth centuries of Talmudic commentary".<sup>46</sup>

In the phrase "the limit itself, all borders, for instance those between private and public, singular and general or universal, intimate or inner and outer" I think it is possible to hear an echo of Agamben's description of the camp in his essay "The Camp as *Nomos* of the Modern":

Whoever entered the camp moved in a zone of indistinction between outside and inside, exception and rule, licit and illicit, in which the very concepts of subjective right and juridical protection no longer made any sense.<sup>47</sup>

In his essay about *Les Immatériaux* from the "Landmark Exhibitions" issue of *Tate Papers*, reprinted in this volume, Antony Hudek (who was co-translator of the recent English version of *Discours Figure*) explicitly connects

44 Ibid., p. 37.

45 Ibid., p. 38.

46 Ibid.

47 Giorgio Agamben, "The Camp as the 'Nomos' of the Modern", in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1998).

*Les Immatériaux* with Auschwitz. He quotes Lyotard's response to Michel Cournot's scathing critique in *Le Monde*, particularly of the technology such as the headsets. Referring to the "postmodern", a term Lyotard himself was responsible for propagating in his 1979 work *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard suggests that

Mr Cournot wanted to revel in the jubilation offered by the new mastery promised by the "technologists", by the prophets of a "postmodern" break? The exhibition denies it, and this is precisely its gambit – to not offer any reassurance, especially and above all by prophesying a new dawn. To make us look at what is "déjà vu", as Duchamp did with the readymades, and to make us unlearn what is "familiar" to us: these are instead the exhibition's concerns.<sup>48</sup>

Lyotard continues:

The idea of progress bequeathed by, among others, the Enlightenment, has faltered, and with it a triumphant humanism. Greatness of thought – Adorno's for example (must I spell his name out?) – is to endure the fright derived from such a withdrawal of meaning, to bear witness to it, to attempt its anamnesis.<sup>49</sup>

Following Lyotard's analysis of painting, Hudek suggests that *Les Immatériaux* offers the chance of an anamnestic working-through of the past, and offered him "the opportunity to work through the haunting of *La Condition post-moderne* ... providing him with a stage upon which to perform the transition from an epochal or modal postmodern into an allegorical or anamnestic one".<sup>50</sup> Hudek remarks that the subtitle for *Les Immatériaux* might have been *L'Esprit du Temps*, which echoes the name of the 1982 exhibition of painting, *Zeitgeist*, and suggests that Lyotard attempted to "reclaim the postmodern from the version of the term" made fashionable by such exhibitions.<sup>51</sup> As Hudek puts it:

Lyotard's own version of a postmodern *Zeitgeist* at the Centre Pompidou was an affective hovering between the "post" he had imprudently prognosticated in 1979 and a lost modernism that could never again be brought back to life. This paradoxical temporal stasis would provide the clearest sign, not of the decline of the twentieth-century avant-garde as such, but of the end of the possibility of recuperating it to justify an increasingly complex and progressively dehumanised technoscientific environment. For Lyotard, the historical break in the telling of

48 Antony Hudek, "From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*." *Tate Papers* [online] 12. 2009, reprinted in this volume, p. 79.

49 Ibid., p. 79–80.

50 Ibid., p. 81.

51 Ibid.

twentieth-century history is marked – as it was for many before him, particularly Adorno – by the mass murder of the Jews during the Second World War.<sup>52</sup>

He goes on to quote Lyotard himself from the essay:

Following Theodor Adorno, I have used the term “Auschwitz” to indicate the extent to which the stuff [*matière*] of recent Western history appears inconsistent in light of the “modern” project of emancipating humanity. What kind of reflection is capable of “lifting”, in the sense of *aufheben*, “Auschwitz”, by placing it in a general, empirical and even speculative process directed towards universal emancipation? There is a kind of sorrow [*chagrin*] in the *Zeitgeist*, which can express itself through reactive, even reactionary attitudes, or through utopias, but not through an orientation that would positively open a new perspective.<sup>53</sup>

Hudek singles out the word “sorrow” (“chagrin” in French), and suggests how striking it is that this element is overlooked in the literature of *Les Immatériaux*. He points out how it is a key term in the French experience of the “stalled remembrance” of the Second World War, as evinced in works such as Marcel Ophüls’ *Le Chagrin et la pitié* (*The Sorrow and the Pity*).<sup>54</sup> Taking his cue from *Le Différend*, Hudek suggests that *Les Immatériaux* stages an experience of temporal indecision, of the “Arrive-t-il?”.<sup>55</sup> In Hudek’s words, “*Les Immatériaux* staged an experience of ‘sorrow’ meant to give rise to a profoundly negative feeling – a feeling the visitor could not possibly have escaped as she wandered through the dark maze of the Centre Pompidou, confronted by the endless choices to determine a trajectory without any identifiable goal in sight”.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, *Les Immatériaux* might be regarded as a kind of unconscious, pre-emptive response to Agamben’s form of Pauline, messianic politics. In its very difficulty and confusion it refused the sublation of Auschwitz into a universal category of contemporary human experience. It is perhaps worth thinking of *Les Immatériaux* as an alternative museological response to the Shoah, an alternative to the Holocaust museums that were beginning to proliferate at that time and which precisely risked (and continue to risk) the “museification” of what they contain, and its making sacred and paradigmatic.

Returning, then, to the earpieces or headphones, and the texts they relayed to the visitors to *Les Immatériaux*: among these texts were some by Samuel Beckett, the artist whose work Adorno had proclaimed as the most appropriate artistic response to Auschwitz, not least because it did not

52 Ibid., p. 82.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., p. 83.

attempt to engage directly with the Shoah. Yet perhaps even more apt – albeit unintentionally – was the fact that the headphones frequently malfunctioned, producing perhaps what André Neher, writing about Auschwitz, called “the silence of God”.<sup>57</sup>

57 André Neher, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981).





# Immaterials, Exhibition, Acceleration

Robin Mackay

*Les Immatériaux*,<sup>1</sup> the exhibition staged by design theorist Thierry Chaput and philosopher Jean-François Lyotard at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1985, confronted an accelerating cycle in which technological instruments afford us a grasp of matter beyond the human perceptual gamut, decomposing the structure of objects into systems of imperceptible elements which are then recomposed, predominantly through the use of machine languages, into new materials. (The term “immaterials” therefore refers to these new materials and their retroactive effect upon our conception of matter as such; not to any notion of the dematerialised, incorporeal or disembodied).

According to the proposition of *Les Immatériaux*, these new developments disrupt the notion of matter as something destined for and subservient to human projects. Rather than a stable set of materials ready for use, we are faced with an unstable set of interactions that problematise apparently stable polarities such as mind versus matter, hardware versus software, matter versus form, matter versus state, and matter versus energy.

In its attempt to articulate this rupture and its repercussions in the form of a public exhibition, *Les Immatériaux* can be regarded as a pivotal moment in the convergence of philosophy, art and exhibition-making. It enables us to take a critical look at a set of intertwined tendencies related to what we might

1 My acquaintance with *Les Immatériaux* has emerged over the course of many discussions, initially with composer Florian Hecker, and, more recently, with philosopher Yuk Hui. This text is drawn from presentations made at several symposia during the course of 2014: at the exhibition *Speculations on Anonymous Materials* at the Fridericianum in Kassel, at *30 Years after Les Immatériaux* at the Centre for Digital Cultures at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, and at *Megarave-Metarave* at Wallriss in Fribourg.

call “the postmodern moment”, which include the emergence of theoretical and/or philosophical thought as a constituent part of exhibition-making and, conversely, the emergence of the contemporary art exhibition as an international arena for (something like) philosophical discourse; exhibition-making as a collective dramatisation of the contemporary conjuncture; and the instrumentalisation of this practice as a mode of cultural capitalisation.

In the following, I first argue for the continuing relevance of the concept of “immaterials” for us today, then go on to examine the exhibition itself, detailing its historical and institutional context and scrutinizing Lyotard’s philosophical and extra-philosophical motivations for entering into the unknown territory of this crossover between disciplines and genres. I suggest that the intentions and means of *Les Immatériaux* should be re-evaluated in the light of the norms, politics and economics of the globalised contemporary art scene that has developed since the time of *Les Immatériaux*, many facets of which were anticipated by the 1985 exhibition. Finally, I ask whether the question of “accelerationism” emerging in contemporary philosophy today (which is strongly linked to a certain turn in Lyotard’s thinking at the time of *Les Immatériaux*) might provide a way to reorient the impulse of *Les Immatériaux* outside of what have now become institutional constraints.

## Immaterials Today

In the 1990s, working with a colony of narcoleptic dogs that had been bred in captivity for several generations in a research facility in Stanford, scientists finally identified the damaged gene responsible for their dynasty of sleepy canines: these dogs lacked a receptor for a neurotransmitter chemical that would later be named *orexin*. This chemical had been identified in the late ‘90s as having an appetite-stimulating effect, and had been earmarked for future obesity research. The discovery at Stanford opened up a different destiny for it, and suggested a novel approach to the development of sleep drugs: whereas scientists had formerly aimed to find neurochemical agents that would encourage the onset of sleep – something that a whole generation of drugs had achieved only by adopting a crude “sledgehammer” approach – research now became focused on blocking the reception of a chemical that is instrumental in keeping the brain in a waking state.

The pharmaceutical giant Merck conducted a computer-controlled chemical scan of a library of three million compounds, compounds which themselves were the by-products of other (both successful and unsuccessful) research projects. A sample of each of these compounds was introduced in turn into a “cellular soup derived from human cells and modified to act as a surrogate of the brain”. An agent was added that would react with orexin and glow if it was present. This automated process was filmed automatically and, over three

weeks, the plates that failed to light up were reduced down to a few for further testing. The resulting new drug is currently under review by the Federal Drug Administration and is expected to come to market shortly.<sup>2</sup>

This type of procedure is in more general use as a technique in materials science called “high-throughput computational design”, which is expected to replace the trial-and-error techniques previously used in developing new materials. It combines the resources of massive computing power and a growing knowledge of how desired properties such as hardness, conductivity, colour, etc., can be attributed to quantum-level characteristics of matter. Once they have identified the low-level configurations of matter that give rise to a certain desired property – its “fundamental descriptor” – scientists at the Materials Project at Berkeley<sup>3</sup> can “access, search, screen and compare” a database of tens of thousands of inorganic materials for candidates. A “golden age of materials design” is anticipated: “[m]assive computing power has given human beings greater power to turn raw matter into useful technologies than they have ever had.”<sup>4</sup>

A material is no longer an obstinate, opaque, natural given, ready to be formed according to a specific human project. Materials are now coded structures that are already the product of a generalised scanning and an immaterial manipulation and production before they even enter the domain of manufacturing. The total combinatorial space of possible configurations (including compounds that do not occur naturally, and are even virtual and as-yet inexistent) is available as a huge memory bank to be searched and probed; increasingly, the same can be said for the neural space of the brain. Rather than being the subject who masters the material object, or the destined recipient of its message, the human is the transmitter of automated discoveries, and in turn is itself treated as a complex of coded, structured matter interfacing with other compounds both organic and inorganic.

Closer to the everyday world, consider the recent mass-market emergence of the electronic cigarette: here the pleasure taken in the inhaling of the smoke of the burning tobacco plant – a ritualised psychotropic act emerging no doubt from a contingent encounter in human history – is analysed into its component parts and simulated through the use of electronic components and inorganic materials. The meanings with which tobacco products were freighted are also disrupted through their transfer into this new, simulated form. The synthetic process splinters the organic meaning of the act of smoking: the neuroactive agent and its addictive properties are separated from the evocations of fire, smoke and ash, with a nicotine-laden glycol-water

2 Ian Parker, “The Big Sleep”, *New Yorker*, December 9, 2013, p. 50–63.

3 See <https://www.materialsproject.org>.

4 Gerbrand Ceder, Kristin Persson, “The Stuff of Dreams”, *Scientific American*, December 2013.

vapour offering a tactile and visual analogue for smoke; the potential to tincture this base with multiple flavours opens it onto the space of the culinary and olfactory arts, and introduces a disturbing parallel to candy (deplored as either infantilising for adults or as a danger to children). In the new simulacra of the aesthetic and – if we might say so – sublime or spiritual aspect of smoking, with its connotations of nihilism or sacrifice, the fatal consequences are attenuated (as far as we know), and the habit is welded to a new complex of associations (the logic of the electronic gadget, that of hardware/software, and, increasingly, that of “hacking”).

In meshing neurotropics with digital electronics (potentially Internet-connected, keeping in mind that vape sticks batteries are charged by plugging them into the USB ports of PCs), what is really created is a generalised platform for the delivery of self-administered pharmaceutical compounds – something that is already being explored by vape “modders”. It would not be stretching things to imagine, a few years from now, that a wireless vape stick will sample its owner’s saliva and, detecting imbalances or being programmed for a required psychotropic state, will immediately synthesise and supply an appropriate cocktail in vapour form, at the same time recording and consolidating the data for mass analysis or crowd-based sharing, data which in turn could be scanned and analysed to develop new products.

Even the time-honoured experience of duration involved in smoking a cigarette disappears, replaced by the temporality of “chainvaping”. The public health (not to mention tax) implications are unclear, and so far the devices exist in a kind of legal and statutory limbo. In short, here as elsewhere, material innovation also constitutes a *cultural* event that has repercussions across many different spheres.

As Lyotard surmised, then, “Immaterials” assemble a machine neoculture whose developments are intractable to the discourses we inherit from humanism and modern progressivism. With a prescient sense of the danger that this revolution of materials could easily proceed uncomprehended by philosophical thought, in staging *Les Immatériaux* Lyotard set himself up as a (devil’s) advocate for immaterials:

Prisoners of the materialism of the industrial revolution, immaterial materials suffer from their invisibility. But it is here that a culture is fashioned, through images, sounds and words.<sup>5</sup>

The few examples I have given – and of course there are many more – show clearly enough that the question of materials has indeed changed register. As Lyotard argues, with these developments we can no longer trust our intuitive categorisation of objects, and their matter can no longer be understood

5 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 10.

as a given that can be expected to correlate naturally with common-sense language derived from our historical interactions with the world. New symbolic machineries, whose rapid and dense operations we can no longer fathom, shape the synthesis of these new “immaterials” that have become a part of our lives; they confound natural language, confronting us with experiences we don’t yet have the words to describe, and in which our place as creator–designer–user is significantly reconfigured by ubiquitous mechanisms of abstraction:

“Immaterial” materials, albeit not immaterial, are now preponderant in the flux of exchanges, whether as objects of transformation or investment, even if only because the passage through the abstract is now obligatory... [A]ny raw material for synthesis can be constructed by computer and one can know all of its properties, even if it does not yet exist or no longer exists.<sup>6</sup>

According to Lyotard, the classic modern (Cartesian) conception of matter sought to expel “secondary qualities” from matter-as-pure-extension; their sensible reception would be only a “theatrical effect” of the body, the body as a “confused speaker” which “says ‘soft’, ‘warm’, ‘blue’, ‘heavy’”.<sup>7</sup> The science of immaterials instead grasps and manipulates these qualities as the effects of relative disparities between memory-systems (tellingly, Berkeley’s Materials Project was formerly known as the Materials Genome Project). In turn, the human mind becomes only one of a series of “transformers” that fleetingly generate immaterials as they extract and contract flows of energy-information: “even the transformer that our central nervous system is ... can only transcribe and inscribe according to its own rhythm the extractions which come to it”<sup>8</sup> – we are synthesisers among synthesisers, and not the destination and arbiter of all matters:

the progress that has been accomplished in the sciences, and perhaps in the arts as well, is strictly connected to an ever closer knowledge of what we generally call objects. (Which can also be a question of objects of thought.) And so analysis decomposes these objects and makes us perceive that, finally, there can only be considered to be objects at the level of a human point of view; at their constitution or structural level, they are only a question of complex agglomerates of tiny packets of energy, or of particles that can’t possibly be grasped as such. Finally, there’s no such thing as matter, and the only thing that exists is energy; we no longer have any such thing as materials, in the old sense of the

6 Ibid.

7 Jean-François Lyotard, “Matter and Time”, in *The Inhuman* (London: Polity Press, 1991), p. 37–38.

8 Ibid., p. 43.

word that implied an object that offered resistance to any kind of project that attempted to alienate it from its primary finalities.<sup>9</sup>

For Lyotard the historical moment of immaterials promises a *deanthropocentricisation* of culture even as it heralds the end of the progressive program of modernity. Far from being simply emancipatory, however, the predicament into which it draws us is profoundly ambivalent: “if we have at our disposal interfaces capable of memorizing, in a fashion accessible to us, vibrations naturally beyond our ken ... then we are extending our power of differentiation and our memories, we are delaying reactions which are as yet not under control, we are increasing our material liberty”; and yet this liberty comes at the price of security, at the price of a counterfinality of technique and a “fore-closure of ends”.<sup>10</sup>

What the age of immaterials promises, then, is a complexification of matter “in which energy comes to be reflected, without humans necessarily getting any benefit from this”.<sup>11</sup> And since immaterialisation, through its generalised coding and redistribution of material affect, also reconfigures our relation to the cultural and the aesthetic, it implies “a profound crisis of aesthetics and therefore of the contemporary arts”.<sup>12</sup> As a deliberate exacerbation of this crisis, *Les Immatériaux* sought to create a “dramaturgy” of the new condition of “interactivity”;<sup>13</sup> to stage the uncertainty and ambivalence of this disruptive moment in the history of matter, exploring “the chagrin that surrounds the end of the modern age as well as the feeling of jubilation that’s connected with the appearance of something new”. Most importantly, it sought “to activate this disarray rather than to appease it”,<sup>14</sup> by creating an experience that would allow its audience to explore the “collective cortex constituted by machine memories”<sup>15</sup> (a formulation that no doubt sounded futuristic in 1985 but is close to being a commonplace today).<sup>16</sup>

## Legitimation, Intensification

It is a question, then, of “legitimation” or “vindication”, of allowing these new materials their proper place in a culture yet to come, and thus of ushering in this culture – an operation that simultaneously entails a calling into question

9 Jean-François Lyotard, Interview with Bernard Blistène, *Flash Art*, March 1985.

10 Lyotard, “Matter and Time”, p. 54.

11 Ibid., p. 45.

12 Ibid., p. 50.

13 “Interactivity” in the ambivalent and disquieting sense that Lyotard gives to it: see his “report” in the present volume.

14 Lyotard, Interview with Bernard Blistène.

15 Lyotard, “Matter and Time”, p. 45.

16 For example Ray Kurzweil, director of engineering at Google, explicitly describes his work in terms of the construction of a “synthetic neocortex”: <http://www.33rdsquare.com/2015/01/ray-kurzweil-is-building-synthetic.html>.

of some of the most fundamental principles of modern thought. This legitimisation entails a kind of destabilisation of the human, an admission that we inhabit a material culture that is no longer “ours”, is no longer straightforwardly “human” – or rather, one that gives us to understand that “human” is no longer a straightforward matter. But how and why did Lyotard come to employ the medium of the exhibition to make this disquieting truth felt?

The initial brief for the project (drafted before Lyotard was involved) speaks of a situation in which the passage from an energy-intensive to an information-intensive society presents “new modes of perception, representation and symbolisation, corresponding to new means of decision, conception and production”.<sup>17</sup> The origin and outcome of production processes, product and raw material, are not straightforwardly distinct any more, and a “profound modification of the duality design/production” is under way, creating a new environment that escapes the symbolic order and the means-end configuration of modernity. For new technologies create their own symbolic order – and a new social order and new modes of distribution along with it. The authors find this process at an acute stage in which it is not yet fixed, and where what is most widely shared is a perplexity, which is what they set out to “dramatise” in the exhibition. Already invoked at this point is the idea of an experimental scenography and alternative pedagogy, placing a series of exhibits within the exhibition space according to a conceptual organisation that would allow for multiple readings.

In taking charge of the conceptualisation of *Les Immatériaux*, Lyotard proceeds to trace these questions to their fundamental roots – calling into question the very notion of “creation” that was present in the initial title (“New Materials and Creation”) and operating an (all told, rather idiosyncratic) conceptual dissection of the meaning of “material”. The structure Lyotard devises for the exhibition suggests that in modernity “the object in general is considered as a sign”,<sup>18</sup> but that the conclusion that therefore all matters are now matters, materials, of communication, remains unexplored. He adapts a model of communication taken from Harold Lasswell’s linguistic pragmatism to distribute the various declinations of the Sanskrit root *mât* (“to make with the hand, to measure, to construct”) in accordance with this model of the various elements involved in any instance of communication. In the first full proposal for *Les Immatériaux* the semantic ambiguity of “material” already plays a role in setting in motion slippages from one semantic zone to another: through shifts in perspective, one and the same material can be seen to occupy various different positions within the communicational structure.

17 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 8.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 17.



Lytard imagines that the dramatisation of this structural slippage (the content of one message may be the material support for another message and, from another perspective, the recipient of yet another, etc.), dramatised within the exhibition space, will produce a kind of disorientation. For “it is not a matter of explaining”, a brief for the project tells us, “but of *making sensible* this problematic ... [*Les Immatériaux*] seeks to awaken a sensibility assumed to be present in the public, but deprived of the means of expression. It wishes to make felt the sentiment of the end of an era and of the disquiet that is born in the dawn of post-modernity”.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the development process Lytard carefully calibrates *Les Immatériaux*’s response to this challenge. Rather than a judgement, it is to be a performative *intensification* that is as one with the *legitimation* of immaterials invoked above: “[I]t is not a matter of making apocalyptic pronouncements or, on the contrary, of affirming that nothing has changed; it is a question of intensifying interrogation and, so to speak, of aggravating the uncertainty that it makes weigh upon the present and the future of humans.”<sup>20</sup>

Before we broach the question of what Lytard qua philosopher brings to the new medium of the exhibition – and indeed what the change of medium offers to the philosopher – we will first trace the history of the site within which this “dramaturgy of interaction” was to be staged.

## The Slaughterhouse and the Piazza

In 1955 the French government resolved to modernise the famous abattoirs of La Villette on the outskirts of Paris, a late nineteenth-century monument to rational industrial design and centralisation.<sup>21</sup> Work began in 1961, with the cost of the project growing from an already enormous 245 million to 110 billion francs, and with a great deal of these funds ultimately left unaccounted for. The new abattoirs and auction market proved obsolete before they were completed. In conceiving of them as a prestigious municipal trophy, the authorities had ignored the problems of situating a massive centralised facility in an already congested city, at a time when decentralisation was the predominant economic and logistical trend. The project proved totally maladapted to the realities of industry. Work at La Villette was discontinued in 1967 and the whole edifice was finally demolished, amidst great financial scandal.<sup>22</sup> With the new slaughterhouse and market dynamited and pulverised, with a great deal of public money having been squandered in the process, La Villette would lie

19 Ibid., p. 26.

20 Ibid., p. 17.

21 See Dorothée Brantz, “Recalling the Slaughterhouse”, *Cabinet*, Fall 2001, <http://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/4/slaughterhouse.php>.

22 See “Les Autres Scandales”, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, September 28, 2001: <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/opinions/00018896.ED10001/les-autres-scandales.html>.

dormant for a few years before eventually becoming the site of a “polyvalent cultural complex”, a “City of Science and Industry”, including a new National Museum of Science and Technology, the Cité de la Musique, and other cultural centres: in effect, an early “cultural theme park”.

Georges Pompidou, who along with De Gaulle and Giscard d’Estaing had presided over this disastrous project, unbowed by scandal and having lubricated the “settlement” of May ‘68, became president in 1971.<sup>23</sup> The neo-Hausmannian zeal of this “managerial medic”<sup>24</sup> for remodelling and modernizing the city continued with the razing of the Les Halles area and the construction of a massively funded cultural centre – the famous building which (instead of the ill-fated slaughterhouse) would take on his name.

Perhaps mindful of the fate of the centralised meat market, the Minister of Culture of the time proclaimed the Centre Beaubourg to be *une centrale de la décentralisation*. There is some truth in this, since it is an institution that had to operate a capital concentration: it needed to figure disproportionately large upon the national cultural scene because France was losing its political gravitas in a globalised, decentralised world. The belief that this powerhouse would reconsolidate some of that power through the cultural realm is indicated frankly enough in the title of the opening exhibition *Paris–New York* (original entitled “Paris–New York–Paris”!).

Needless to say, the Beaubourg prefigures many subsequent trophy projects: in a model to be followed worldwide, it was supposed at once to cement the importance of culture as a dimension of national patrimony worthy of international recognition, and to kick-start the “regeneration” of an old area of Paris into a *quartier des arts*, a “high-rent location for editorial offices, publishing houses, architects and boutiques”<sup>25</sup> all clustered around the Piano-Rogers “cultural warehouse”.

## Cultural Space

The appearance of the Beaubourg is also contemporaneous with a certain set of expectations demanded of public exhibition-making. The appointment of Pontus Hultén<sup>26</sup> was a symbol of the institution’s determination to at least *be seen to be* taking seriously the propositions and demands of the broadened field of contemporary art emerging in the ‘60s within the inherited institutional framework it sought to reinvigorate and capitalise

23 See Paul Jankowski, *Shades of Indignation: Political Scandals in France, Past and Present* (Oxford, NY: Berghahn), p. 88.

24 Ralph Rumney, “Pompidou’s Multi-Coloured Dream-Machine: Or How They Opened the £125m Art Refinery”, *Art Monthly*, February, 1977.

25 Nancy Marmer, “Waiting for Gloire”, *ArtForum*, February 1977.

26 Willis Domingo, “Pontus is Pilot: A Profile of Pontus Hultén”, *Art Monthly*, February 1977.

on. In Stockholm, Hultén had proved his ability to attract a non-traditional audience through a festive programme of controversial happenings and cross-disciplinary initiatives across the arts, sciences and pop culture. Upon his appointment at the Beaubourg he spoke enthusiastically of the need to “create new institutions”:

we are probably moving towards a society where art will play a very large role... While waiting for art to be integrated with life and penetrate society in its entirety, exchange (between artists and the public) must take place in “museums” newly conceived. Such museums will no longer be simply areas for the conservation of works ... but places where artists encounter the public and where the public itself can become creative... we must try to *open up* the museums.<sup>27</sup>

In Hultén’s words we find encapsulated the articles of faith of a new conception of art – and thus of the museum and the exhibition – that perhaps have a different and less hopeful resonance today: the faith that the avant-garde dream of the unification of art and life is all but achieved, subject to delivery through natural dynamisms at work in society; the anticipation of an age in which “a greater part of the population no longer has to struggle every day for survival” and will thus reclaim artistic creation from the elite; and an affirmation of the role of the metropolitan arts complex in helping to break down “cultural attitudes” and in “opening up” – vertically (to new audiences) and laterally (to non-art disciplines) – the space of culture.

Hultén sees the space of the museum in terms of an urbanist logic: the museum should be “in the form of a city”, a “system of rooms” that “communicate and interpenetrate”, so that the one would have the “chance of losing oneself and reorienting oneself”. In the framework of this perpetual mobility, in a building where even the director’s office is circumscribed by temporary mobile wall panels,<sup>28</sup> and where transparency and porosity extends from the external architecture to the configuration of the inner space and the interaction of audiences, Hultén imagines, for example, the viewer of a Braque collage having the option to press a button to bring down a screen upon which five more collages are mounted – or not, if she doesn’t want to! Thus technology is anticipated as a prop for the new museum’s aspiration to dream in advance the deterritorialised free circulation of a new kind of society.

To what extent did the inscription of this prestigious multi-billion-franc project within the narrative of an avant-garde unification of art and life succeed? In a conversation between Hultén and Richard Rogers in 1981, it is impossible not

27 Ibid.

28 Richard Eder, “Beaubourg’s Director Reflects on his Reign”, *The New York Times*, February 22, 1981: <http://www.nytimes.com/1981/02/22/arts/beaubourg-s-director-reflects-on-his-reign.html>.

to notice a certain slippage, and a modulation of the original heady ambitions. Rogers opines:

I think that the Beaubourg has democratised or popularised culture. It gives all people of all classes and ages something to do on a Saturday afternoon. You, as a specialist, can go to the museum; your grandmother can go to the restaurant; and the kids can play in the square.<sup>29</sup>

Which Hultén amplifies as follows:

Usually a museum ... is just a museum. At the Beaubourg, you have a whole series of overlapping things to do, and therefore the area becomes much more active. It's more like a railway station... It's the theory of the flexible magic box, which includes the piazza. Nothing is ever static, and nothing is ever perfect.<sup>30</sup>

In the same year but in less sanguine spirit, interviewed by the *New York Times* on his departure from Paris, he says simply:

I wanted – it sounds stupid – to bring art and life together, something like that. Rauschenberg said it better: the museum of the future is to be in the little crack between art and life. It sounded very good at the time.<sup>31</sup>

The success of the regeneration exercise now appears in a more ambivalent light:

Society loves it. The artists don't ... The bohemian life that reigned in Paris until the end of the '50s is gone. The artists [then] had more time to think, to reflect.<sup>32</sup>

By this time it was already tempting to read this gigantic culture machine as a synecdoche for the generalised spaces of dynamic circulation, according to whose exigencies a new city and a new society were indeed being formed; spaces that formed a suitable receptacle for the “festive neoconservatism” denounced by philosopher Gilles Châtelet, in which “cultural production” is incited to be a facsimile or working scale-model of economic dynamism, oriented towards an optimisation of the liquidity of all flows<sup>33</sup> – or, as Baudrillard has it, in what reads retrospectively like an ironic *détournement* of

29 “A Flying Start”, interview with Pontus Hultén and Richard Rogers, *Images&Issues*, Summer 1981: [http://s3.amazonaws.com/eob\\_texts-production/texts/127/1344579035\\_IMAGES\\_ISSUES\\_PDF.pdf?1344579035](http://s3.amazonaws.com/eob_texts-production/texts/127/1344579035_IMAGES_ISSUES_PDF.pdf?1344579035).

30 Ibid.

31 Eder, “Beaubourg’s Director Reflects”.

32 Ibid.

33 See G. Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs: The Incitement of Envy and Boredom in Market Democracies*, trans. R. Mackay (Falmouth and New York: Urbanomic and Sequence Press, 2014).

*Les Immatériaux*'s proposed slippages between form, content and material support:

Never has it been so clear [as at the Beaubourg] that the contents – here culture, elsewhere information or merchandise – are merely the ghostly support for the opposition of the medium whose function is still that of beguiling the masses, of producing a homogeneous flow of men and minds. The huge surges of coming and going are like the crowds of suburban commuters absorbed and disgorged by their places of work at fixed hours. And of course it is work that is at issue here: the work of testing, probing, directed questioning. People come here to choose the objectified response to all the questions they can ask, or rather *they themselves come as an answer* to the functional, directed questions posed by the objects.<sup>34</sup>

An alignment of the radical extension of the avant-garde project with the creation of a central–decentralised node of cultural circulation, at once a prestigious asset in the soft power of the nation-state and a symbol of the degradation of culture into a bargaining chip, all “while waiting for art to be integrated with life and penetrate society in its entirety” – to whatever degree this was a calculated risk, it was certainly a pioneering one, albeit on the part of a statesman who had more than enough resources at his disposal to stake on such a venture. As a profile of Hultén in *Art Monthly* in 1977 admits, “one can only speculate that the man whose name the new cultural centre bears was gambling that behind Hultén’s image in the French press as the ebullient anarchist lies the potentially docile and productive reality of the *jeune cadre dynamique*” – that is, that the reassertion of culture as a soft-power asset of the nation-state would merely set the stage for the real economic game of installing, in the surrounding remodelled streets (the “hygienic buffer zone”, according to Baudrillard), the aggressive vanguard of an urbane, “nomadically” precarious, networked and networking “creative class”.<sup>35</sup>

## The Project

It is in this context – albeit after the departure of Pontus Hultén and his replacement by Dominique Bozo – that *Les Immatériaux* was conceived. Before Lyotard’s involvement, the project had been brewing since around 1982, under various titles, as an exhibition to be mounted “on the theme of new materials and creation” by the *Centre de Création Industrielle*.

The Centre Pompidou was founded as a collaborative space of different cultural centres, and, alongside the Modern Art Museum and IRCAM (the

34 Jean Baudrillard, “The Beaubourg Effect: Implosion and Deterrence”, trans. R. Krauss and A. Michelson, *October* 20 (Spring 1982), p. 7–8.

35 See Châtelet’s biting satirical portrait of this “young nomad elite” in *To Live and Think Like Pigs*.

generously-funded electronic music institute ordered directly by Pompidou to bribe Boulez out of exile) the *Centre de Création Industrielle* (CCI) was formed to represent the worlds of design, industry and architecture. The CCI's early years were marked predominantly by a failure to integrate happily into this transdisciplinary family – perhaps owing to the continuing presence of “an interior uptight with old values” beneath the “fluid commutative exterior” (Baudrillard again): an exhibition on “The Factory” was viciously publicly attacked by ministers; one on “Marginal Architecture in the US” was the subject of controversy because of the inclusion of political texts (by Herbert Marcuse, Jerry Rubin and Allan Ginsberg); and, most sensitively, a film scripted by Henri Lefebvre about the problems caused by the “renewal” of the urban fabric of Paris was banned by Robert Bordaz, Director of the Beaubourg. The director and assistant director of the CCI departed soon afterwards, with Bordaz himself temporarily taking over its directorship.

The CCI was finally closed down a few years after *Les Immatériaux*, so that the show can be seen at once as its one signal achievement, and, as Anthony Hudek has suggested,<sup>36</sup> also as a “hinge” in the history of the Pompidou itself; at once the point at which its ideal cross-disciplinary post-museum status was effectively achieved, and the last exhibition in which that ideal would be seriously pursued.

*Les Immatériaux* certainly took full advantage of the open and indeterminate space of the fifth floor, and its dazzling range of exhibits taken from industry, art and commerce lived up to the promise of transdisciplinarity. Yet at the same time it seemed designed to baffle its audience: the grey metallic meshes hung from the ceiling blocking any overall perspective, the labyrinthine set of “zones” impossible to navigate, the (often malfunctioning) audioguide that switched from one soundtrack to another as the visitor moved through the space. Far from Hultén's slick vision of an audiovisual apparatus gliding into view at the viewer's command (or not, if she doesn't want it to), for Lyotard “interactivity” suggested a disorienting condition in which the visitor was just one more interface relaying matter-information, subject to lines of force and flows of energy that could never be satisfactorily integrated, a “rhizome” of “generalised interactions” through which there was no “preferred path”. Lyotard speaks of

processes of displacement in which man is but one node of the interface. The exhibition would be one interface among others ... [T]here should be places where the visitor is no longer an actor ... vague terrains, physical frontiers or sonorous frontiers of fringes of interference.<sup>37</sup>

36 Anthony Hudek, “From Over- to Sub-Exposure: The Anamnesis of *Les Immatériaux*”, *Tate Papers*, Autumn 2009, <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/over-sub-exposure-anamnesis-les-immateriaux>. In this volume, p. 74.

37 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 13.

He explains this approach, at length, in terms of a deliberate violation against the traditional space-time implied by the gallery. The gallery is “an establishment of culture – that is to say of acquisition and assimilation of heterogeneous data – within the unity of an experience which constitutes a subject”; its spatial set-up is precisely designed in order to facilitate this synoptic pedagogy.<sup>38</sup> Lyotard seeks with *Les Immatériaux* to overturn this “modern-dominant” model of the museum gallery in which the visitor is reduced to an eye moving through a perspectival perceptual space, in a formative journey with a certain didactic finality. The development of an alternative “postmodern” space-time, conceived by Lyotard on the basis of a strange alignment of Diderot’s *Salons* with postmodern urbanists, architects and sociologists,<sup>39</sup> recalls significantly Hultén’s urbanist conception of the museum. Lyotard describes it more expansively in terms of driving from San Diego to Santa Barbara, in a zone of “conurbation” where “the opposition between centre and periphery disappears” and where “one must retune the radio many times ... it is a nebula, where materials are metastable states of energy. The roads, the sidewalks, have no façade. Information circulates through irradiation and invisible interfaces”.<sup>40</sup> This conceptualisation of the show was even extended to the catalogue, whose *Album* lays bare the processes of development of the concept, while the *Inventaire* gives the reader a set of loose-leaf representations of the “sites” within the show, which can be reconfigured and reordered at will.

*Les Immatériaux* was no world’s-fair-type extravaganza, then. What is noticeable in the first full brief of the project following Lyotard’s involvement, and even more so in the exhibition itself, is the way in which he injects the excitement engendered by cutting-edge developments with a note of *chagrin* – anxiety, sorrow or disappointment – from the hegemonic misdeeds of the modern project across the world wars and the holocaust – central subjects of his writings at the time. The exhibition opens not with flashing computer screens but with the desolation of the body in five Beckettian scenarios, and with Joseph Losey’s sombre film *Monsieur Klein*. Thus, if *Les Immatériaux* seemed in certain senses to satisfy the Pompidousian agenda, it also introduced an abrasive approach to both content and form that was apparently at odds with it. Indeed, these contradictions and ambivalences are clear in the very conception of a project that adopts a proto-cybernetic theory of communication as the armature for an experience that renders “clear” communication impossible. But at the same time, one also wonders whether its conceptual interrogation was shielded from the political and economic context within which it was produced.

38 Ibid., see also Lyotard, “After Six Months of Work...”, in this volume.

39 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 19.

40 Ibid.

At least one member of the CCI team admits to a concern that these latter aspects were missing from the show's "materials". A press conference text for *Les Immatériaux* declares: "Insecurity, loss of identity, crisis, are not expressed only in the economy and the social, but also in the domains of sensibility, of knowledge and of the powers of man ... and modes of life".<sup>41</sup> In a contemporaneous interview with the CCI team, during a discussion of the "global" point of view adopted by the exhibition, and the risk that it may be perceived as a "reactionary ... apology for technology", Chantal Noël suggests that *Les Immatériaux* should be seen as a "preliminary enquiry" leading to further interrogations. Sabine Vigoureux replies: "One might all the same ask why, from this preliminary enquiry, all economic and social analysis is excluded. As if thought in its pure state were independent of these factors, when in fact they also have an influence on thought. Personally, I saw this as a deficiency, at the outset"; to which Nicole Toutcheff replies that these factors are indeed present, but simply not systematically presented as such, and that the overall conception of the show obviates such concerns, since "an interesting aspect of this kind of philosophical discourse is that it does not try to organise these scattered elements into a system".<sup>42</sup>

Certainly none of the team – least of all Lyotard – could have been unaware of the problematic context outlined above (Lyotard mentions ambivalently the question of the Beaubourg's "centrality" in his report during the last stages of planning).<sup>43</sup> Baudrillard had issued his brilliant, withering analysis of the "carcass of flux and signs" in 1981.<sup>44</sup> But if we place it side-by-side with Baudrillard's ferocious satire, we can perhaps see Lyotard as striving to counter-instrumentalise the space he had been offered: "if you had to have something in Beaubourg – it should have been a labyrinth", says Baudrillard;<sup>45</sup> Lyotard uses the reconfigurable space to build a darkened labyrinth on the fifth floor – or something even less ordered than a labyrinth (for, as Lyotard notes, even a labyrinth usually has one thread and restricts movement to particular paths).<sup>46</sup> "And they stampede to it... because, for the first time, they have a chance to participate, en masse, in this immense work of mourning for a culture they have always detested... The masses charge at Beaubourg as they do to the scenes of catastrophes, and with the same irresistible impulse", says Baudrillard;<sup>47</sup> Lyotard tries to create an experience that heightens unease and disquiet and confirms the demise of modern culture. "The only content of

41 *Les Immatériaux* catalogue, *Album*, p. 26.

42 "La Règle du Jeu: Matérialiser les Immatériaux", interview with the CCI team, in E. Théofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et Après? "Les Immatériaux"* (Paris: Autrement, 1985).

43 See Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work...", in this volume, p. 59.

44 Baudrillard nevertheless cooperated with the Centre Pompidou (notably on the journal *Traverses*) for many years both before and after the publication of *L'effet Beaubourg*.

45 Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg Effect", p. 6.

46 See Lyotard, "After Six Months of Work ...", in this volume, p. 62.

47 Baudrillard, "The Beaubourg Effect", p. 8.



Beaubourg is the masses themselves, whom the building treats like a converter, like a black box, or, in terms of input-output, just like a refinery handles petroleum products or a flood of unprocessed material", says Baudrillard; Lyotard invites the masses to experience themselves as material "transformers" alongside the immaterials they have come to explore, and looks into installing electronic systems to involve visitors interactively by monitoring and gathering data on their visits.

*Les Immatériaux* is undoubtedly more than just a symptom. As Lyotard recounts at length in his report,<sup>48</sup> inside the project an acute struggle is taking place with the conditions under which it was possible to make the exhibition happen. Yet *Les Immatériaux* perhaps paid too little attention to the way in which its elaborate sabotage of the space and conception of the *modern* gallery risked being undermined by the problems of a *postmodern* space that was designed precisely to supersede that classical-modern framework. When Chaput reflects on this institutional problem, he seems to understand the latter as simply an extension of the former:

I don't think that there is any contradiction in the sole fact that philosophical discourses change medium. The problems start when one wishes to make it the object of mass consumption. Doing philosophy in the framework of a public service (which Beaubourg is) is no straightforward matter. The whole "communication", "mass", "democracy", "public service" aspect has not been an easy fit with the innovative principles of the exhibition... The "exhibition" medium, the Pompidou Centre, are tools conceived as vehicles for a unique meaning and devices to share it through successive capillaries as far as possible. Here, we do the opposite: one product with multiple meanings, confided to the sensibility of individuals. This is rigorously the inverse of traditional communication.<sup>49</sup>

This predicament is reflected in the sometimes baffled and ambivalent responses to *Les Immatériaux*. A contemporary review by Kate Linker in *ArtForum*,<sup>50</sup> while convinced by the show's conceit, judges that its execution "banalised its central themes", with "too much mechanical hokum – too many light machines and holograms, too many buttons to push and atomisers to squeeze", with "technology occupy[ing] center stage", "inevitably valorised, and thereby mystified". But if this "change of medium" for philosophy looks, ironically, "better on paper", she admits that its failure "raises the question of whether profound shifts of a philosophical nature can be represented through objects".

48 Ibid.

49 "La Règle du Jeu", p. 16.

50 Kate Linker, "A Reflection on Post-Modernism", *ArtForum*, September 1985.

It is doubtless *Les Immatériaux*'s simultaneous success and failure – its contradictory status as both an expensive, technically-demanding, trailblazing postmodern technological extravaganza *and* a sombre subversion of communication – that makes it interesting for us today. This ambivalence, as Linker indicates, is owed at least in part to the difficulties involved in transfusing philosophy into the medium of the exhibition. How, then, did Lyotard envision this transfer, and what motivated him to attempt it?

## A Medium of Resistance?

Chantal Noël, one of the team from the CCI who worked on *Les Immatériaux*, speaks of “philosophy changing its media. It comes down to inscribing this exigency in another space and with other means than those of the book”. “Through the ‘exhibition’ medium”, she continues, “the cultural institution becomes a site where certain reflections of a philosophical order can be grasped.”<sup>51</sup> We might agree, but at the same time we need to acknowledge that this proposition already gives rise to another set of questions: What is the exigency of philosophy? Simply to create a state of wonder, or questioning? To craft and communicate new concepts? To offer a glimpse of the resolution of social or political problems? To shape intuitions or symbols that schematise concepts? And what is the function of a “cultural institution” in relation to such aims?

Moreover, what made this question of a “change of medium” appealing for Jean-François Lyotard at the time of *Les Immatériaux*? It seems that he found himself under pressure from two related movements: Firstly, at a distance of a decade and a half from ‘68’s transdisciplinary delirium, he observed the one-way drift of institutional philosophy back into a closed circle of scholars, and an embattled one at that. At the time of *Les Immatériaux*, philosophical activity in its traditional (university) setting was beginning to be challenged by the edicts of neoliberal “pragmatism”, “communication”, and “efficiency” (a process whose nadir seems to be in sight today). Outside the academy, meanwhile, a new breed of professional public intellectuals – the *nouveaux philosophes* – had emerged to proudly sweep under the carpet all of the conceptually violent, antihumanist enquiries of poststructuralist thought, railing against its abrasive experimentalism, its uselessness for immediate practical politics, and its nihilism, and seeking to reestablish thinking upon solid ground with the human as a fixed point from which to assert, as Lyotard writes in *The Inhuman*, “the authority to suspend, forbid interrogation, suspicion, the thinking that gnaws away at everything”.<sup>52</sup> Yet at the same time, within the most disparate of *nonphilosophical* spheres – biology, design, art and science,

51 “La Règle du Jeu”, p. 16.

52 Jean-François Lyotard, “Introduction: About the Human”, in *The Inhuman*, p. 1.

and everyday life itself, straining under the torque of technical developments whose vocation had never been to “make sense” and whose deliverances scramble the finalities of humanism and modernist optimism – philosophical questions presented themselves not just as unavoidable, but in the form of a generalised intense *experience* of disorientation.

The enlightenment institutions within which philosophy could traditionally claim a rightful place are in decline, then, and yet a tacit appeal for philosophy comes from every quarter. This, Lyotard says, is what gives rise to a philosopher’s need to go outside the university; he states this explicitly as one of the reasons for his involvement in *Les Immatériaux*: “A philosopher like me is more inclined to think his interests lie in becoming involved in what happens outside institutions; that he needs to get out of the university. Hence my presence in the team planning *Les Immatériaux*... Beyond institutionalised philosophy, there is a philosophy yet to come, one which corresponds to the abolition of ‘disciplinary’ boundaries.”<sup>53</sup>

Refusing the clear and efficient communication commanded by the *nouveaux philosophes*, *Les Immatériaux* would precisely not address its audience in any illusorily straightforward way. In its dramatisation of philosophy, it set out to resist the consensual stifling of the fundamental *inquiétude* that constitutes the being of the human, and would even aim to amplify the intensification of this inquietude in an increasingly technicised environment.

It is worth noting here that this two-way resistance is no less pertinent today, when there is little diffusion of academic philosophy outside the university walls, and when, if “philosophy” ever does appear in a popular setting, it is still more or less in the “communicative” form outlined above, or even worse: philosophy as an alternative form of entertainment, distraction, therapy, self-help, as a diversionary enrichment of one’s life, and so on. Moreover, any attempt today to bring philosophy into the public sphere in the more indeterminate, challenging way that Lyotard prescribes will find itself in direct competition with a more formidable claimant: increasingly, over the past 40 years, contemporary art has established itself as the primary cultural site where a public thinking recognisable as philosophical takes place. This new agora is all the more formidable a competitor in that, within it, participation in contemporary thinking is said to take place not through a laborious study and working-through of concepts, but through collective and individual experiences and happenings. Precisely the kind of “dramaturgy” of ideas that Lyotard pioneered in *Les Immatériaux* has in effect become endemic. Thus, as we look back on *Les Immatériaux* 30 years later, we can see it as one of the first events in which philosophy and the art of the exhibition were brought

53 Jean-François Lyotard, Élie Théofilakis, “Les Petits Récits de Chrysalide” (interview), in Théofilakis (ed.), *Modernes, et Après?*, p. 5–6.

together in such a way – with all the ambivalence entailed by that pioneering status.

*Les Immatériaux* sought to make good the deficiencies of philosophy in its public role by reasserting philosophy's vocation: that of exacerbating inquietude rather than issuing reassuring communications based on an assumed common ground. And yet it was of course conceived as a project that would gain a large audience. It at once embodied and challenged the emerging model of the exhibition as a public spectacle – a model which, one might argue, merely feeds into the communicative frenzy of accelerated development. In this sense, too, *Les Immatériaux* can be understood as a kind of hinge point: it seems to be poised on a knife-edge between satisfying the Beaubourg cultural megamachine's call for polyvalent cultural communication, on the one hand, and entirely sabotaging these demands with disorientation, indetermination, and greyness ("philosophy paints its grey on grey!") on the other. As we shall see, the roots of this ambivalence must be sought within Lyotard's philosophical work of the time.

### ***Inquietude and The Accelerationist Error***

At the same time as Lyotard is tempted to undertake *Les Immatériaux*'s experiment of pursuing philosophy "in another medium", his writings attest to a renewed commitment to philosophy "itself". It is as if, during this period – at least in the texts collected in *The Inhuman* (which, as Lyotard reminds us, were largely delivered to nonprofessional audiences) – the philosopher was undergoing one of those upheavals in which technical labour, and the unfolding and elaboration of a programme of investigation, gives way once again to philosophizing as such: indeterminate, ambiguous, puzzling and open. (As he writes in *The Differend*, a "weariness with regard to 'theory'" means that "[t]he time has come to philosophize."<sup>54</sup>) All of this makes these writings valuable for those of us who – naively, and counter to professionalisation, archiving and exegesis – wish to take philosophy outside of the academic cloisters and do philosophy not "by the book" but "from the heart". Perhaps we might legitimate such naivety by appealing to tradition and saying that this heart is Augustinian: *Inquietus est cor nostrum*, says Augustine: our heart – for Augustine, that of postlapsarian man – is unquiet, it can find no rest; its inquiry into itself – *the question I have become for myself* – is not one of patient, systematic exegesis, but something more like a continuous unease, or even panic. This *inquietude* is a keyword that appears continually in Lyotard's vision for *Les Immatériaux*.

54 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele, p. xiii.

Augustinian *inquietude* is reprised by Pascal in the anthropology at the heart of his fragmentary, agitated, exemplarily modern corpus: an anthropology abbreviated in the *Pensées*' terse formula: "Condition of man: inconstancy, boredom, inquietude."<sup>55</sup> In Pascal as in Augustine, the attribution of inquietude to man as a primordial condition is not understood merely as descriptive, but as a *normative* and even *programmatic* demand: not only is inquietude an inevitable aspect of human existence no matter how much we may try to suppress it; it is to be acknowledged, exacerbated and intensified – and this is the philosopher's task. The philosopher's job is to stir up trouble in himself and his fellow humans, to expose the constitutive inquietude at the heart of the human, which modern civilisation intensifies while supplying us with endless distractions with which to repress and ignore it.

Nowhere is this inquietude stronger in Lyotard than in his departure from Marxism. In his emotionally charged 1982 memoir of Pierre Soury, <sup>56</sup> Lyotard expresses exquisitely the pain of his inability in all conscience to accede to the certainties required in order to commit himself to "the struggle": his doubts as to the inability of orthodox Marxism to describe the contemporary world; his suspicion of the dialectic as a universal language (language-game); and his conviction that capitalism has entered into an unprecedented phase, in which the supposed certainties of its so-called "organic development" are subverted. It is at this point in Lyotard's work that we arrive at the question of "accelerationism".<sup>57</sup>

The circulation of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's 2013 "Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics"<sup>58</sup> has led to a reconstruction and reappraisal of what Benjamin Noys has retrospectively dubbed the "accelerationist" period in French theory, a period which begins precisely with Lyotard's (and Deleuze and Guattari's) break with Marxist orthodoxy.<sup>59</sup>

Galvanised by the events of May '68 and driven to a wholesale rejection of the stagnant cataracts of orthodox party politics, in his text of 1972 *Energumen Capitalism* and 1974's *Libidinal Economy* Lyotard suggests that emancipation of desire be sought not through the dialectic, not through the party, but by way of the polymorphous perversion set free by the capitalist machine itself. Errant forces are at work *in* the signs of capital itself, he says. The indifference of the value-form, the machinic composition of

55 On inquietude in Pascal, see Alexandre Declos, "L'Inquiétude dans les *Pensées* de Pascal", *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 78 (2013), p. 167–184.

56 Jean-François Lyotard, "A Memorial of Marxism", in *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 45–75.

57 On accelerationism, see R. Mackay and A. Avanessian (eds) *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader* (Falmouth and Berlin: Urbanomic and Merve, 2014).

58 Ibid.

59 B. Noys, *The Persistence of the Negative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 4–9.

labour, and their merciless reformatting of all previous social relations is seen as the engine for the creation of a new fluid social body. It is the immanence with universal schizophrenia toward which capital draws social relations that promises emancipation here, rather than the party politics that, no doubt, paled by comparison with the oneiric escapades of '68. The credo of accelerationism is most explicitly formulated by Gilles Lipovetsky in his reading of Lyotard: "[R]evolutionary actions' are not those which aim to overthrow the system of Capital, which has never ceased to be revolutionary, but those which complete its rhythm in all its radicality, that is to say actions which accelerate the metamorphic process of bodies."<sup>60</sup>

Accelerationism in its contemporary form, on the other hand, while drawing heavily upon this moment, introduces some different nuances; it is said to consist in

[T]he assertion that the crimes, contradictions and absurdities of capitalism have to be countered with a politically and theoretically progressive attitude towards its constituent elements. Accelerationism seeks to side with the emancipatory dynamic that broke the chains of feudalism and ushered in the constantly ramifying range of practical possibilities characteristic of modernity... [T]he focus of much accelerationist thinking is the examination of the supposedly intrinsic link between these transformative forces and the axiomatics of exchange value and capital accumulation that format contemporary planetary society. According to accelerationism, then, the transformations wrought on the planet and on the human by globalised technology, the corrosion of tradition and heredity, the artificialisation of experience and the inextricably global reformatting of the social are not deplorable ills, they are not only inevitable but present an opportunity to extend the ongoing adventure of the human project. And crucially, the claim is that to think this is not merely to acquiesce to capitalism but to speculate beyond it: that acceleration can be an emancipatory vector of enlightenment.<sup>61</sup>

Before turning to this contemporary accelerationism, let us ask whether it is possible that *Les Immatériaux* was also a part of Lyotard's reckoning with the "accelerationist" moment in his work. In several of his works from the '80s, Lyotard speaks of that period as a *lapsus*. First of all in *Peregrinations* – where he talks about *Libidinal Economy* as his "evil book, the book everyone is tempted to write".<sup>62</sup> And secondly, and more indirectly, in the introduction to *The Inhuman*, where he seems to deplore the impulse behind this work and

60 Mackay and Avanessian, "Introduction" to *#Accelerate*, p. 11–12.

61 Ibid., p. 4.

62 Jean-François Lyotard, *Peregrinations: Law, Form, Event* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 13.

to regret the mistakes he made in the wake of his departure from the party line. Lyotard's key point here – one echoed by many critics of contemporary accelerationism – is that the accelerationist error consists in *a failure to draw a distinction between two types of the inhuman*:

The inhumanity of the system which is currently being consolidated under the name of development ... must not be confused with the infinitely secret one of which the soul is hostage. To believe, as happened to me, that the first can take over from the second, give it expression, is a mistake.<sup>63</sup>

The fatal mistake of accelerationism was to believe that, on the horizon of the deterritorialisation opened up by capital, there would be disclosed an originary desire that could flow free of instituted structures of power. Now, however, Lyotard takes a more sober view of the dangers involved in capitulating to “the imperative to introducing ever more mediations, of breaking down and modulating everything to assure more control and more capacity and a ‘richer’ set of possible modifications” – a generalised differentiation of which “new technologies and the media are aspects”, a process which “is reproduced by accelerating and extending itself according to its internal dynamic alone ... assimilat[ing] risks, memoris[ing] their informational value and us[ing] this as a new mediation necessary to its functioning”.<sup>64</sup> What he once saw as the revolutionary “metamorphic” potential of capitalist deterritorialisation, he now sees as a process that, in its inexhaustibility, “takes away the hope of an alternative”.<sup>65</sup> What is more, just as development does not entail emancipation, so the inhumanity of the system does not preclude a banal humanism. The rise of the *nouveaux philosophes* has proved that there is in fact no incompatibility between the alienations of capital and the reinscription of an all-too-human mask from which spout communicative homilies that act as a suitable emollient for inquietude.

Given that the above description of “development” cited above is not dissimilar to Lyotard’s definition of the “immaterial condition”, let’s hypothesise that the two are not unconnected, and that, in *Les Immatériaux* as in *The Inhuman*, Lyotard is seeking a third option – neither socialism nor barbarism – and in doing so, seeking to atone for his error. In *Les Immatériaux*, he continues to interrogate the technosocial reformatting of the human through inhuman material memory. He certainly does not erect any moral objection to it – in fact, as we have seen, he constructs the notion of *immaterials* precisely so as to *let them speak*, to legitimate them as an object of philosophical discourse, breaking them out of the modern paradigm and allowing them to be

63 Lyotard, “About the Human”, *The Inhuman*, p. 2.

64 Ibid., p. 7.

65 Ibid., p. 6.

expressed according to their proper nature. As we have suggested, this also involves a “legitimation” of the inquietude they provoke. And, finally, it is this inquietude that gives rise to the immanent demand for a non-institutional philosophy conducted by other means. But what relation do these exigencies have to Lyotard’s retreat from his accelerationist stance?

The attempt to legitimate immaterials without returning to his irresponsible accelerationist stance generally gives rise to an advocacy of *slowness*. “To go fast is to forget fast”, under the imperative “Be operational or disappear”,<sup>66</sup> whereas “writing and reading which advance backwards in the direction of the unknown thing ‘within’ are slow”.<sup>67</sup> Lyotard here seems to rediscover the theme of anamnesis as the “other of acceleration”.<sup>68</sup> He recovers this classical philosophical term – the remembering of what was already within, the immemorial non-self in the self, glazed over by *doxa* and by everyday habit – as the name for a recovery of the “other” inhuman; a recovery that takes place through an *advocacy* of immaterials that is not, however, a *submission* to the vista of sheer acceleration they open up. The age of immaterials and the demands it makes upon thought open a deep chasm within the human which must be carefully distinguished from the promise of cheap accelerationist thrills – the *jouissance* of which, precisely, would collude with “communication” and “development”.

Lyotard links the *immaterial* closely to the *immature*;<sup>69</sup> and the anamnestic inhuman is the province not of the urban sophisticate but of the child. For Lyotard, “the child is eminently the human because its distress heralds and promises things possible” – that is, it attests to what is not yet securely bound within the horizon of the human, and demands and makes evident the incompleteness of the labour of becoming human. Humanism conceived as already achieved and complete (the smugly-assumed majority of the *nouveaux philosophes*) is but a façade of maturity, a feigning of adulthood whose stance is entirely compatible, ideologically speaking, with the merciless acceleration of capital. But presumably accelerationism goes in the opposite, equally undesirable direction, losing sight of the *inquietude* of the child as it gazes rapt at the imagined spectacle of a deterritorialised future.

As Pascal tells us, we may create endless “diversions” in order to forget our inquietude and the vacuity it alerts us to – and yet all this will achieve is to deepen it. In Lyotard’s words: “the system has the consequence of causing the forgetting of what escapes it. But the anguish is that of a mind haunted by a familiar yet unknown guest which is agitating it, sending it delirious but also making it think – if one claims to exclude it, if one doesn’t give it an outlet,

66 Ibid., p. 2.

67 Ibid., p. 2–3.

68 Ibid., p. 3.

69 See Lyotard, “After Six Months of Work...”, in this volume, p. 34.



one aggravates it.”<sup>70</sup> Inquietude therefore needs to be recognised, awakened and intensified, an inquietude which – according to Pascal – stems from our vacuity, from the fact that we do not know what we are. And, as Chaput declares:

The proposition of *Les Immatériaux* is ... to make felt, to show, troubledness, inquietude and madness.<sup>71</sup>

Lyotard's accelerationism was really about the acknowledgement of the end of the human project understood as a project of will, as the collective project of enlightenment. Through technics, through the hegemony of the exchange-form of value, through the automation and autonomisation of the machine of development, human projection into the future had been usurped by the autonomic will of capital, a blind and infinite will-to-will, a purposiveness whose only purpose is to produce more, to extract more, to mediate more – what Lyotard now calls “development”. Clearly, the accelerationist error had been to place faith in the emancipatory dynamic of this autonomic process.

Lyotard's *immaterialism*, however, still corresponds to the renunciation of the modern Cartesian vision of authorial projection, the free imposition of a project conceived by the will upon a matter which is an indifferent patient for the human agent. But it combines this renunciation with a recusal of the accelerationist faith in capital's futurity. It is in something like a state of shock (to use Bernard Stiegler's expression) that, while defiantly resisting any nostalgic reaction against the disquieting technical edifice of immaterials, Lyotard seeks to undertake a “deeper reflection” that would discover their more fundamental significance by way of anamnesis or the “other inhuman”.

It is difficult, however, not to see this contemplation without project as being, also, a retreat. The risk is that it consigns philosophical thinking to an even more confining sequestration, and that, moreover, it attests to a continuing faith in an underlying reality of the (in)human, or of thought, that can be extracted, recovered, and provide succour – even if this recovery is infinitely deferred. At the same time as he wants to reflect that immaterials are transforming the human, Lyotard also wishes to move this reflection to a register that will effectively be a prophylactic against machinic contamination, since it indicates that thought can maintain a reflective distance. And it is *the exhibition* that then comes to stand for this free space in which we can distance ourselves from the accelerative process and return to a thought that “doesn't have its place and time on the support of inscriptions” and that “remains unknown to the breachings and scannings”.<sup>72</sup>

70 Lyotard, “About the Human”, p. 2.

71 Thierry Chaput, voiceover in the short film *Octave dans le pays des immatériaux* (dir. Paule Zajdermann, 1985).

72 Jean-François Lyotard, “Logos and *Techne*, or Telegraphy”, in *The Inhuman*, p. 55.

The intention here, after all, seems to be to reinscribe the machine within a technical space that is *lacking in being* – which suggests that *Les Immatériaux* stakes everything on a test which, on the basis of affective response, would reinscribe the border between man and replicant.<sup>73</sup> Although this “recovery” will never be complete, the experience of inquietude furnished by the drama of the exhibition in effect becomes proof of the human’s resistance to absorption into the accelerative dynamic.

## Exhibition and/or Laboratory

In general, cultural investment in the exhibition as a site for thinking has only intensified since *Les Immatériaux*. Many contemporary art projects, often with the imprimatur of a philosopher, and often mixing “non-art” objects with artworks, promote the idea of a community of inquietude and indeterminacy that exists fleetingly, fugitively, in the hidden corners of “the system of development”, in places of contemplation or collective fabulation, thus reconfirming that some immemorial site remains for a thinking outside of it: this, it seems to me, is precisely the hope of the contemporary form of public exhibition, and of the world of contemporary art in general.

The aggressive drive to exacerbate inquietude present in *Les Immatériaux*, however, seems to have given way to more anodyne forms. Wary of asserting any purpose or project, retreating from the technosocial realm, cowed by the dread that technology = rationality = mastery, many of these cultural reflections are prey to a certain institutional calcification of the dogmas of indeterminacy and sublimity. Their articles of faith are the community of that which cannot communicate its community; the value of open, free, nondetermined play, receptiveness, and indefiniteness; and the insistence that we must build spaces in which *not* to conceptualise, explicate, project, plan, assert, or produce. In the guise of sombre reflection, this distances both art and philosophy from the forces and knowledges that shape the world. Moreover, when non-art objects are brought into the exhibition space, they are precisely severed from these complex productive forces and rendered over to a system of circulation that wrongly supposes itself capable of distancing itself from them. Why does an artist take disquieting, vexing, puzzling objects from the world of contemporary capitalism and place them inside this other environment? Because these materials are what construct our technosocial situation. With what purpose? The artist refuses to tell you, because his value as artist is precisely to tear these objects away from their functional integration into “the system of development” and to present them in a space of indeterminacy, to enable us to reflect upon them in a deeper manner. To

73 On Lyotard’s post-accelerationist project as an extended *Bladerunner*-style “voight-kampff test” see I. H. Grant, “LA 2019: Demopathy and Xenogenesis”, in Mackay and Avanessian (eds), *#Accelerate*, p. 275–301.

what effect? To aim at effects would be precisely to cede to the system – the artist does not do this, because he is well aware that the modern idea of will is compromised by the evils of capital, that accelerated development makes of any human “project” an absurdity.

What is disturbing now, in short, is that the presentation of inquietude has become indistinguishable from a certain quietism, and that “the gallery” has once again become the “establishment of a culture”, albeit a distinctively (post-)postmodern one. Perhaps the type of project anticipated by *Les Immatériaux* is now fully integrated into the consensual politics proposed by the *nouveaux philosophes* and by neoliberalism, as a sanctioned form of communication. It has found its proper place, as a passive contemplation without project, which, at most, nurtures the forlorn hope of preserving thinking intact within a sequestered space. The edifying function of inquietude is fully integrated into the circulatory system of the culture and communications industry that Lyotard had hoped his sombre grey labyrinth would delay or obstruct. All of this means that we must look at *Les Immatériaux* not in a nostalgically indulgent mode, but from the point of view of a contemporary situation which it anticipates and which it played a part in creating, at the same time as it set out to resist it.

Today’s exhibitions, with catalogues full of philosophers’ essays, and whose eclectic exhibits sagely reflect on various “materials”, “objects” and “things”, provoke some ambivalence as to “which inhuman” they serve: the troubling reflection that erodes self-certainty and exposes us to immanent crisis, or the accelerating circulation of messages quite capable of comforting and reassuring us as they lubricate development and the extraction of surplus value; the child who speaks in an alien tongue, or the infantilised adult of consumer capital, a relay for platitudes of cultural literacy and self-satisfied “contemplation”? Just as Lyotard returned to his earlier “mistake”, the dialectic within *Les Immatériaux* between acceleration and anamnesis should be critically revisited in order to assess the context in which its producers sought to stage this struggle through a dramatisation within the space of the exhibition.

It is easy to pledge allegiance to our inquietude, to acknowledge the indeterminate nature of what it is to be human, without assuming the collective responsibility to once more determine what we will make of ourselves. This latter question is the one that contemporary accelerationism sets out to ask,<sup>74</sup> insisting that the impossibility of fixing our place in relation to matter in terms of an inherited concept of mastery *does not* have as its necessary consequence that we must resign ourselves to merely contemplating our possible fate from

74 See Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, “#Accelerate: Manifesto for an Accelerationist Politics”, in Mackay and Avanessian (eds), *#Accelerate*, p. 347–361.

within a sheltered space. In its renewed optimism and advocacy of enlightenment, it reminds us that we have modes of thinking at our disposal that go beyond Cartesianism mechanism and Laplacean determinism, and argues that we have the means to orient ourselves speculatively within these new spaces and to positively take hold of inquietude.<sup>75</sup> Whether or not one finds convincing the broad sketches set out so far by contemporary accelerationism, I would argue that its basic impulse poses an appropriate challenge that today invites us to reach beyond the stakes of *Les Immatériaux*: that of decoupling the experimental exploration of the unknown spaces that immaterials open up from the profit axiomatic, and of doing so beyond spaces of contemplation and indeterminacy that present the fleeting illusion of shelter or dazzle us with the sublime aestheticised spectacle of our own disorientation, within the context of a culture industry whose productions are safely sequestered from that of which they speak.

According to Srnicek and Williams,<sup>76</sup> accelerationism is a matter of remaining true to both inquietude and the avant-garde will to become inhuman, but also of imagining ways to collectively undertake the reformatting of the socius, to *reorient* the hegemony of sociotechnics, the extension of the “collective cortex constituted by machine memories”.<sup>77</sup> For isn’t the time for melancholy and mourning – the “first state of shock”, in Bernard Stiegler’s words – now over? Don’t we need to go beyond stupefaction, and doesn’t *Les Immatériaux* ultimately still fall too much on the side of *chagrin* rather than *jubilation*? To go further calls for a transformative anthropology rather than an apologetic anthropology, and a constructive rather than a reflective immaterialism. It calls for the involvement of philosophical thought across disciplines, certainly, but in the register of design and production rather than exhibition and reflection. The greatest problem of politics and of desire is the mismeasure between possibility and reality to which technocapitalism constrains us. The experiment is already being conducted upon us, but how do we break into the laboratory? How do we mobilise that which is awakened by the inquietude of the immaterial age yet which resists the system of development (the “other” inhuman) in the direction of the construction of an immaterial future? This is a task that arguably no longer belongs within the register of reflection or of exhibition, even the *surexposition* that *Les Immatériaux* intended to operate. For ultimately, if we are to take on the philosophical and political stakes that Lyotard wished to bring to light in *Les Immatériaux*, perhaps the exhibition is no longer the appropriate site for such a process.

75 As many contemporary accelerationists argue, science fiction should be an inspiration here, as it turns fear and inquietude into excitement at unknown possibilities – let’s not forget that Lyotard himself says the goal is “to move from *melancholia* to *novatio*, from *chagrin* to *jubilation*”.

76 Ibid.

77 Lyotard, “Matter and Time”, p. 45.

Despite the feverish hybridizing of contemporary philosophy and contemporary art, today we rarely see anything as acutely expressive as was *Les Immatériaux* of the tension between the demands of neoliberal cultural institutions and the will to use the exhibition as a medium for thinking. Rarely do the two sit together in quite such open discomfort. At a time when we risk creating a closed-circuit between theoretical production and contemporary art, Lyotard's heartfelt wish to use the "new support" of the exhibition for philosophical thought in order to "dramatise ideas", to reach an audience beyond both academic philosophy and the art-museum audience, and to do so by *disquieting* them, remains inspiring; yet its implicit critique of the "modern gallery" needs to be extended into a consideration of the machine of cultural circulation that is the contemporary exhibition; the conventions and limitations of this institution of culture also need to be challenged, in order to move toward a *constructive* immaterialism. As Lyotard says:

There is a gap between what is proposed to us for our little everyday lives, and the enormous capacities of experimentation and their ramifications in the social, opened up by technoscience. People are very aware of this. Leading a dog's life when one is at large in the cosmos, etc. ... A laboratory humanity, that is to say an experimental humanity, this would be the best outcome of the crisis.<sup>78</sup>

78 Ibid., p. 11, and 13.





# From Immaterials to Resistance: The Other Side of *Les Immatériaux*

Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein

*Les Immatériaux* has often been seen as a celebration of information technology and a new postmodern world based on the immateriality of flows of information. The proposal here is that the underlying conception was far more ambivalent, not in the sense of some psychological hesitation on the threshold of the new, but rather as something inherent in the things themselves – most importantly, because the very sense of “thing” here was at stake due to the changes wrought upon our sensorium by technology, in the widest sense of the term.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, a sequel to *Les Immatériaux* entitled *Résistances* was planned, and would have dealt with the underside of communication: noise, distortion, and the dimension of experience that resists both consciousness and language. This part was never completed, and what remains are only the accounts of participants in Lyotard’s seminars.<sup>2</sup> It can however be understood as aligned with the direction in which Lyotard’s own research was moving at the time, away from the postmodern as a universe of messages and codes, and retrieving some of his early ideas worked out already in *Discours, figure*: touching, the event, and what he called “passibility”. *Les Immatériaux* may then be seen in conjunction with this second exhibition that never took place. This,

1 The argument sketched out here is extracted from a forthcoming book, *Spacing Philosophy: Jean-François Lyotard and the Philosophy of the Exhibition*.

2 Philippe Parreno and Hans Ulrich Obrist, *The Conversation Series 14* (Cologne: Walter König, 2008), p. 17. The specific claim that will be made throughout this essay, that the planned sequel to *Les Immatériaux* was to have dealt with the resistance to communication, is based on Parreno’s recollections, and in this it can obviously be contested; the presence of the theme as such in the writings of Lyotard from 1985 onwards, however, is undeniable.



of course, is a tenuous proposal. We have no way of knowing what the sequel would have looked like, and any claims about it must remain conjectural. And yet to undertake the task of imagining such a second part, we suggest, means to continue Lyotard's thought into the present, and to remain attentive to its complexity and contradictions, both as a conceptual investigation and as a practical task.<sup>3</sup>

## Resistance, Possibility, Infancy

If the project presented in 1985 was incomplete, at least if seen in relation to the possibility of a sequel, then we must attempt to locate something like an ambivalence or hesitation in the underlying conception. In fact, there are traces of a change in Lyotard's approach that seems to occur at roughly the same time as *Les Immatériaux* – a *fact* which makes the exhibition into something like a point of bifurcation, as if the unease that it aspired to bring about in the spectators first of all struck Lyotard himself. Throughout the books and articles that would follow, he moves away from the philosophy of phrases and the claims about communication and the pervasive linguisticity of experience that formed the organizational grid for *Les Immatériaux* – or, as we prefer to read this juncture, he began to develop precisely this moment of unease as that which gives thought, the unthought underside of the communicational paradigm as an irreducible resistance that is not simply negative, but that into which thinking must tap in order to uphold its strange incapacity and belatedness as a promise.

Entitled *Résistances*, the unrealized project for a second exhibition would likely have focused on necessary zones of friction and on what first appears as an irreducibly *material* dimension, even though such materiality in turn must displace the inherited notion of matter, just as the immateriality of immaterials is not simply a resuscitated version of Platonic ideas. Material and matter are here not meant as mere physical inertia or passivity, as the *hyle* that cannot exist other than as informed by a *morphe*, but as a modality of givenness as such, a resistance that bypasses or passes in-between the sensible and the intelligible. And if *Les Immatériaux* somewhat cautiously suggested that matter was here referenced only in a contradictory fashion, Lyotard will in his subsequent writings speak of matter in a sense that relays this contradiction, in an attempt to think matter not as a metaphysical category set in opposition to mind, soul, and consciousness, or to idea, form, and ideality, but as something at the limit of thinking, which calls thinking forth just as it withdraws from it.

3 As a second part of this investigation, Daniel Birnbaum, Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno will curate an exhibition entitled *Résistances*, which will continue Lyotard's ideas into the present. This project informs some of the claims at the end of this essay, even though the exact shape of this exhibition is at present still not decided.

From the point of view of communication, the second part of the exhibition would have focused on its obverse side: noise, loss, scrambling, and disorder; all of those facets of experience that offer a resistance to transmission. Beginning in the physical sense of resistance (as in the resistance produced in electric circuits), the theme may obviously be expanded to cover all facets of experience, and it belongs to the indeterminacy that is inherent just as much in immateriality and ideality as in matter and its various cognates. Thus, even if the first exhibition can at first sight be taken as championing various forms of dematerialization, the attentiveness to forms of resistance was in fact present throughout, even though in an oblique manner – which is why one might assume that the planned sequel, at least to a certain extent, was already present in *Les Immatériaux*, as a kind of undercurrent or possible counterpoint reading against the grain. What such an exhibition would have looked like in the mid to late 1980s must of course remain purely conjectural, and our proposal here is rather to trace this idea of resistance as it is reflected and inflected in many other questions and concepts that Lyotard was developing simultaneously with *Les Immatériaux*, and that would follow him to the end.

One term that surfaces in some of Lyotard's writings contemporaneous with and adjacent to the 1985 exhibition, and which seems to gather together many of the senses of the theme, is *passibility*, which we here choose as our point of entry into this complex of ideas. The term originates in medieval theology, where it denotes God's capacity to be affected by the course of the world instead of simply remaining sealed in a state of impenetrable plenitude or "impassibility". In modern philosophy it seems to have been taken up by Levinas (who also became a major source for Lyotard's reflections on the possibility of a radicalized version of Kantian ethics from the latter part of the '70s onwards), and has gained currency in some strands of contemporary phenomenology, where it is often understood in terms of a "radical passivity" that can draw on Husserl's extensive manuscripts on passive synthesis and explorations of the level of subjectivity that lies at the fringes of its constitutive power.<sup>4</sup> The above phrase "capacity to be affected" must be understood with equal emphasis on both terms, so that the paradox that was already present in the theological tradition is allowed to exert its full power. In pointing to an intermediary zone, neither simply active nor passive – which in the theological register would amount to a divine middle voice of sorts – it opens an obscure domain of the in-between, neither first nor second, neither the stuff of givenness nor the forming concept. In this sense, passibility may be understood as developing what Lyotard already in *Discours*, *figure* called "event" or "donation",<sup>5</sup> and which in the later works also appears in

4 See, for instance, Didier Franck, *Dramatique des phénomènes* (Paris: PUF, 2001).

5 In an earlier essay, we have attempted to outline the genesis of these themes in Lyotard's early work – which, however, will remain in the background here. See Daniel Birnbaum and Sven-Olov Wallenstein, "Figuring the Matrix: Lyotard's *Les Immatériaux*,

the guise of “touching”, “presence”, or “gift”, drawing on the Kantian sublime, Heidegger’s *Ereignis* and the *es gibt*, as well as affectivity in Freud.

Implicated in all of these references is a peculiar structure of time as delay and deferral, which Lyotard often describes in terms of the Freudian concept *Nachträglichkeit*, a “deferred action” that scrambles the before/after structure of consciousness. For Lyotard, rather than being simply the opposition to presence, deferral will prove to be fundamentally entangled with it, fusing into a complex idea of presence itself *as* deferral. Presence and delay are thus not two distinct ideas, but make up a constellation in which presence eventually becomes an overarching term for that which is elusive or even erased in experience; that which resists the unifying capacity of the retentive and protentive structure of consciousness, while yet being *given* in a way that holds consciousness captive, haunting it in the form of an event or an occurrence that it struggles to grasp.<sup>6</sup> In the essay “Time Today”, Lyotard writes: “What memorizes or retains is not a capacity of the mind, nor even inaccessibility to what occurs, but, in the event, the ungraspable and undeniable ‘presence’ of a something which is other than the mind, and which, ‘from time to time’, occurs.”<sup>7</sup> For Lyotard, however, the event is not only some overpowering or disruptive occurrence, as in the Freudian trauma, but more like a constant dimension of experience itself, the eventhood or “eventuality” of that which touches us at the level of affective sensibility – which is also why it becomes an important concept in aesthetics, even though the latter is a term that Lyotard distrusts, perhaps hastily, because of what he sees as its pacifying nature. The event signals the irruption of something in the sensible, in the *aisthesis*, that demands to be articulated, and calls forth our capacity of reflection.

In a different register, the delay of the event, the temporal fold that joins past and present, in Lyotard also receives the name of “infancy”.<sup>8</sup> Infancy, as the etymology *in-fans* signals, is located before language, though not merely in a

1985”, in Thordis Arrhenius, Mari Lending, Wallis Miller and Jérémie Michael McGowan (eds.), *Place and Displacement: Exhibiting Architecture* (Baden: Lars Müller, 2014).

- 6 Lyotard often explicitly, but perhaps too hastily, denies that phenomenology would be able to approach such a presence. His use of “presence”, however, comes close to Heidegger’s term *Anwesen*, “presencing”, understood as a verb, in opposition to presence as *Anwesenheit*, the form or modality of that which is present, i.e. beings. Presencing is that which remains concealed in the present, belonging to the dimension of the event (*Ereignis*) as that which “gives” but cannot be apprehended as given in the entity. Lyotard’s presence might in this sense be read as belonging to a phenomenology “*éclatée*”, as Dominique Janicaud calls it (without any reference to Lyotard); see Dominique Janicaud, *Phenomenology “Wide Open”: After the French Debate*, trans. Charles N. Cabral (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).
- 7 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 75.
- 8 For a rich exploration of this theme that rarely refers to Lyotard, yet remains close to him in many respects, see Christopher Fynsk, *Infant Figures* (Stanford: Stanford

chronological sense, but also as an underlying order that subsists throughout adult life in its entirety. It is never accessible to memory and conscious representation, but only given as a “debt” that we can never pay off, and as such it also has a close proximity to an aesthetic that must remain at the limits of *aisthesis* because it touches us, as an event, at the fringes of the sensible, before the ego has acquired any definite shape. In the essay “Prescription” Lyotard suggests that “aesthetics has to do with this first touch: the one that touched when I was not there... The touch has its place and moment in a savage or alien space and time that are foreign to the law. And to the extent that it maintains itself, persists in the mode of this immemorial space-time, this savagery or this sinful peregrination is always there as a potential of the body.”<sup>9</sup> Childhood can in this way even be understood as “inhuman”, in that it exceeds our life as rational subjects, and its mode of being is that of the remainder, of return and haunting. In another register, however, it is also what is eminently *human*, because its “distress heralds and promises things possible” as well as “manifests to this [adult] community the lack of humanity it is suffering from”.<sup>10</sup>

The response to this touch or event on the part of thinking must take the form of *writing*, Lyotard sometimes suggests, a writing that originates in the body – which in relation to *Les Immatériaux* would mean to complete the trajectory that the exhibition proposes in the opposite direction, taking us from language to body: to return to the body means to uncover the other side of “the immaterials”, their inescapable resistance to universalization and translation into numerics, though not in the sense of an origin or ground in a life-world that would precede them as an anexact and more fluid material on which idealizations are performed.<sup>11</sup> But this infant body can also – and perhaps more surprisingly, since, unlike what Lyotard here refers to as the “phenomenological body”, it withdraws us from the world of transitivity and relations – be taken as a source of resistance in a much more straightforward sense. This comes across in the essay on Orwell’s 1984 in *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants*, where Lyotard looks to the main character Winston’s attempt to retrieve a different language inside the official lies by probing into a childhood that is his own and no one else’s, which still invites a “sharing

University Press, 2000). For a study of Lyotard’s later phase, see Geoffrey Bennington, *Late Lyotard* (CreateSpace, 2008).

9 Jean-François Lyotard, *Lectures d'enfance* (Paris: Galilée, 1991), p. 39.

10 Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p. 4.

11 This would be Husserl’s answer, as presented in the *Crisis* texts from the late 1930s. Lyotard’s path would rather seem to take him into the vicinity of Heidegger. It is only by following the movement of technology to the end, through its consummate emptying out of humanism, that we can begin to grasp its essence as something other than machinery.

of sensibility that it can and should take as communal".<sup>12</sup> Such a sharing has its obvious predecessor in the Kantian *sensus communis*, and Lyotard is here at once close to and far from Arendt's political philosophy,<sup>13</sup> but also to the Benjamin of *One Way Street* and *Berlin Childhood*: what is important is not the singular facts in their empirical specificity, but a "childhood of the event", that which brings us together precisely by not being captured.

Against the theories of pragmatics and communication that were at stake already in the first discussion of the postmodern condition, but also shifting the accent from the systematic analysis of phrases in *Le Différend*, these later texts suggest that it is on the basis of and drawing from the *incommunicable* and *incommensurable* in our experiences that we *communicate*, rather than through a shared set of contents and claims about the world, or through the application of a set of transcendental rules that would govern the formation of phrases and arguments. While the incommensurability between phrase regimes was one of the major themes of *Le Différend*, and the theme of blanks, caesuras, and silences was essential for the analysis of why phrases must be linked to each other in the absence of defined rules (so that silence too is a phrase like any other), in the later writings the dimension of the body and its affectivity, which was largely absent from the philosophy of phrases, returns and provides the idea of blanks and gaps in language with a different kind of depth. That which lies in between phrases is not just silence and gaps, but indicates a dimension of affectivity and sensibility that is the precondition for phrasing as such.

## The Crisis of Foundations

In a little-noticed text from 1989, "Argumentation et présentation: La crise des fondements",<sup>14</sup> Lyotard speaks of this depth, as something that on the one hand – depending on one's philosophical convictions – threatens or promises to disappear, and on the other ceaselessly returns as a mirage or an infinite task, in terms of a *crisis of foundations*. Understood in the most general sense, the crisis has no doubt been around since the dawn of Greek philosophy (*krisis* in fact being one, or perhaps *the*, key operative term already in the Poem of Parmenides), but has acquired a particular depth in modernity, especially after the violent transformations of the sense of space and time – of the

12 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilée, 1986), p. 142–143.

13 See "Le survivant", in *Lectures d'enfance*.

14 The text was originally published in André Jacob (ed.), *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, vol. 1, *L'univers philosophique* (Paris: PUF, 1989), p. 738–50, and has not been reprinted in any of Lyotard's books. It is here cited from the English translation by Chris Turner, in *Cultural Politics*, Volume 9, Issue 2 (July 2013), p. 117–143.

“transcendental aesthetic” as delineated by Kant – and continues to haunt our present in an even more intensified form.

Historically, the phrase “foundation crisis” stems from the debates that occupied the mathematical and physical sciences during the early decades of the twentieth century, and it concerned the very sense of the reality to which theories could refer once the classical conceptions in science had been discarded. For Lyotard, this implied a blow against the referential as well as pragmatic values that traditional science could rely on, a profound mutation in thought’s relation to its other, to something like being itself. The aporia of the given and the constructed imposed itself throughout philosophy and the various sciences, and just as the idea of a foundation that would be simply given appeared increasingly tenuous, so the claims about a univocal and rational method of construction became doubtful as more and more paradoxes emerged in the foundations of logic and mathematics. Many analyses, direct and indirect, were proposed, from the sense-data reconstructions of logical positivism to the life-world of Husserl and the clearing of being in Heidegger, and Lyotard suggests that what is at stake here is the question from where the object would be “ob-jected”: that is, whether there is anything at all that precedes our constructions, or if the technical efficacy of science is simply all that remains.

For Lyotard, this crisis, in all the various contradictory shapes that it took, cannot be solved in the way proposed by Karl-Otto Apel, that is, by recourse to a “metapragmatics” that locates the ground of reason in rules of argumentation, themselves in turn founded in a community of rational agents.<sup>15</sup> This solution is based on the idea of a universal and transcendental communicational competence that aspires to displace the foundational claims made by philosophers like Husserl and Descartes by showing that all such claims already presuppose communication. In this, Apel’s rejection of earlier version of foundationalism provides yet another ultimate foundation of reason, this time by recourse to an idea of ultimate rules of argumentation that must be (indeed have always necessarily been) respected in all other previous or future foundational language games in order for them to make sense, and in this way can lay claim to a transcendental status. As Lyotard remarks, however, Apel remains largely silent on the content of these rules, somewhat vaguely referring to a common focus on the problem to be solved, or the aspiration to achieve rational consensus – and perhaps, one might

15 Apel cites Wittgenstein, who speaks of a “system” within which any “confirmation and disconfirmation of a hypothesis takes place”, a system which is “not so much the point of departure, as the element in which arguments have their life”. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, trans. Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974), sec. 105. For Lyotard this element is not so much a system as a field of a “certain pre-cogito phenomenology” that he locates in Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible*, which shows the renewed relevance of phenomenological themes in Lyotard’s later work.

add, necessarily so, since any more substantial specification would already commit him to a particular philosophical claim and deprive the rules of their “meta”-pragmatic status; they would be yet another move in the game, and not the condition for the game – any game – as such. Against this, Lyotard suggests that what advances the sciences is rather the scrambling and breaking of rules – scientists are more prone to empirical than transcendental pragmatics, he somewhat ironically quips. The transcendental account in fact always comes too late, and is incapable of elucidating the emergence of the new, of the eventful dimension of thinking. In this, the discourse of science is more akin to the moves made in ordinary language – and, we might add, to philosophy, as Lyotard will later say in *Le Différend*, where it is the very sense and even possibility of any such rules that are the objects of discussion, and thinking must proceed in an experimental fashion without any once-and-for-all pre-established guidelines. What it means to think philosophically cannot be decided through a recourse to pre-existing rules; rather, the rules are what results from the process of thought, which itself is in search of the rules that guide it. And in this philosophy communicates with both science and art through a common zone of indeterminacy – which, however, they *inhabit differently*, we might say.

With respect to the idea of foundations, for Lyotard this necessitates a reappraisal of what must precede all rational constructions, for which he finds the resources in Kant – or, more precisely, in a Kant reread in the light of our present concerns, which the sciences at the horizon of the *Critique of Pure Reason* foreclosed by offering securities that are no longer our own. The question of foundation has to do with space and time, or more generally the idea of something sensible as such, which is something on which all constructions are made, though itself not there as a given, but rather as that which is withdrawn. In Kant, Lyotard suggests, there is already an attempt at “tracing the path toward an infancy of thought that is always presupposed in its adult age (which is argumentative) and ever present as something concealed”,<sup>16</sup> and which becomes even more pronounced as we move from the space-time of the first *Critique* to the rather different approach of the third *Critique*, which provides the bridge to Lyotard’s own reflections on the possibilities and limits of aesthetics. Here the pre-objective domain is what gives rise to a reflective judgement that bears on “feeling”, in a “plasmatic” state, in a way that for Lyotard underlies all other claims, rather than just being an intermediary capacity located between cognition and ethics: “Kantian aesthetics, in its architectonic guise, teaches us something much more radical: that reflexive judgement is, if not constitutive, then at least required by the other faculties of

16 “Foundation Crisis”, p. 126.

knowledge and that feeling is the primordial, fundamental mode of reception of any givenness."<sup>17</sup>

This is also where he once more comes back to his earlier discussions of Merleau-Ponty in *Discours, figure*, and how the analogy with the visual field might allow us to approach the layer of the pre-objective: "the analogy is not an arbitrary one, since the 'free-floating forms', to which Kant refers the aesthetic feeling, also constitute without a doubt the weft or, as Merleau-Ponty has it, the 'nervures' of the field of perception ... [even] 'nervures of being.'"<sup>18</sup> And yet – and in this the claims of *Discours, figure* against the phenomenology of perception as well as against the phenomenological "flesh of the world" remain in place – there is always a difference in the visual, an invisibility for which terms like non-presentable and sublime may stand as markers. This once more signals a departure from Merleau-Ponty, which is not just one of vocabulary – since the invisible here is not what already begins to transcend the sensible in the form of ideas and concepts – but the moment of donation that underlies the sensible and only can be reached through a dispossession of subjectivity of a more radical nature than that attained through the descent into the flesh. If the aesthetic takes us toward this region, it is thus also, always, as an "anaesthetic" that opens towards the event.

At the end of this essay, however, Lyotard suggests that this crisis of foundations can in fact be overcome in a way that does not preserve the dimension of the event, but rather produces something like its final occultation. This could perhaps be understood as something like a *crisis of the crisis* – or, in Heideggerian terms that Lyotard here perhaps brushes aside too quickly, the *forgetting of forgetting*, the technological *erasure of the withdrawal* that is necessary for beings to appear – and he envisages the possibility that donation might have become a calculable construct, a *physis* synthetically produced in "technoscience", in a way that directly picks up the basic theme of *Les Immatériaux*. "The new *techne*", he writes, "in keeping with the essential concept of *figere* inherent in it, enables us to obtain not only 'results' in all sorts of calculations but sounds, colors, or, in other words, materials and arrangements of things both musical and plastic. These are now replacing 'forms' that arise out of the synthetic power of the imagination, or out of the Other. They are not apprehended reflexively; they are determined by calculations, both in their 'design' and in their restitution and dissemination. And calculation includes not only the work that occupies the time of computer engineers but also the – itself constitutive – accounting of spaces and times (including all those known as working spaces and times) expended in the production and dissemination of synthetic materials and

17 Ibid., p. 128.

18 Ibid., p. 133.



forms.”<sup>19</sup> “Anthropologically”, Lyotard concludes, this transfer from intuition to calculation and construction can be interpreted as “an emancipation of human beings from their condition as earthly animals”; “transcendentally”, on the other hand, such a crisis “remains to be thought through”.<sup>20</sup> It is to this thinking through that the work after *Les Immatériaux* was dedicated.

## Rewriting Freud

It is at this juncture of Lyotard’s work that Freud too returns, and the exchange between psychoanalysis and phenomenology begun in *Discours, figure* is taken up again, albeit in a transformed fashion. If, in his early work, Lyotard arrived at a set of affirmative claims about energies and forces, these will now be displaced by what he sometimes, with a term borrowed from Lacan, calls “the Thing” (*la Chose*), a body that is held hostage to something that it cannot decipher. This is the infant body, not in a simply chronological sense, but as a site of pre-inscription that will always remain with us, drawing together the birth of the subject as conditioned by the sexual difference and the emergence of something out of nothing in terms of the ontological difference, so that the priority between them becomes entangled and undecidable.

In this renewed reading of Freud, the idea of passibility is worked out in terms of affectivity, which in many ways pursues old themes, but also gives them a new twist. While the philosophy of phrases in *Le Différend* has evacuated the possibility of the physics or metaphysics of drives that once underwrote the claim that “The Dream-Work Does Not Think” (as reads the title of one of the central chapters in *Discours, figure*), it nevertheless opens a more positive approach to language, though one that still wants to steer clear of the theory of the signifier that for Lyotard limits the Lacanian approach, to which he nevertheless remains close. While, as we have noted, already in *Le Différend* phrases are understood as events in a broad sense, constituting a category that expands beyond the narrowly linguistic to include silences and affects, this latter dimension ultimately remained marginal in the earlier book, and the dynamic and affective dimension of the Kantian faculties was largely overshadowed by Wittgensteinian motifs. In this sense it is no doubt significant that Wittgenstein’s importance will diminish as we move into Lyotard’s final phase, when the connection to phenomenology and psychoanalysis will be made once more.

In the new approach, the unconscious is reconstructed as an “inarticulate phrase”, or an “affect-phrase”. This phrastic quality does not mean that it presents a universe according to the axes sense-reference and sender-receiver. What is presented is rather a feeling of pleasure and pain that

19 Ibid., p. 140.

20 Ibid., p. 140f.

remains non-localizable with respect to the coordinates of the universe of language as the presentation of something objective; and as we will see, in this it is akin to the feeling of pleasure and pain as laid out in Kant's third *Critique*, which provides a bridge to aesthetics. What transpires is that there is something there, there is an "it happens" which, however, is betrayed as soon as it is translated into a communicative language.

This new take on the unconscious is spelt out in detail in the essay "Emma",<sup>21</sup> where Lyotard interrogates one of the case histories in Freud's 1895 *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, which indeed is one of Freud's most physicalist texts, where he speaks of forces that produce "facilitations" (*Bahnungen*) in a way that would draw him close to Lyotard's early conception of energetics. What comes across in this later reading by Lyotard, however, is the problem of time, of how events are inscribed and become meaningful in a particular structure of deferral. The unconscious affect, Lyotard suggests, can remain unrecognized while still entering into consciousness through a substitute that cannot be understood.

The patient Emma's fear of going to the store alone is, in Freud's analysis, linked to two scenes from her childhood; neither of which, however, is sufficient to account for her present state. Lyotard suggests that they must be understood as overlaid, so that the first scene only produces its traumatic affect when it is remembered and activated at a subsequent stage, in a kind of retroactive or inverted causality that is at the basis of Freud's theory of *Nachträglichkeit*. In Lyotard's reading of the Emma case, what is important is Freud's idea of a primal repression – that is, an object that never was conscious, and which may account for the presence of originary formations in the unconscious, as was already suggested in the elusive position given to the matrix in *Discours, figure*.

For Lyotard, the possibility of this primal repression signals something like a pure *passibility*, where the affect is inscribed without ever being conscious, and only appears at the later stage; a capacity for being affected regardless of whether the event can be represented or not, which implies that the active-passive distinction is derivative in relation to such primordial events. Such an event cannot be represented or remembered; it is a pure event, and its time is the present, the here and now; while – from the point of view of consciousness, and of what can be named in language – it will never have been there at all as a content. The pure presence eludes consciousness, structurally, while consciousness as such is held in the grip of this presence, which is what locates it in a childhood beyond memory.

21 In Jean-François Lyotard, *Misère de la philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 2000). For a lucid discussion of this text in relation to Lacan, see Anne Tomiche, "Rephrasing the Freudian Unconscious: Lyotard's Affect-Phrase", in *Diacritics*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring, 1994), p. 43–62.

This dimension also comes across in that particular quality of language known as *timbre*, which Lyotard investigates in another essay, “Voix”, dedicated to the problem of language in psychoanalysis. What lies at the core of the Freudian enterprise, at a depth that may have escaped Freud himself to the extent that analysis remains modelled on Socratic dialogue, is not speech in the sense of the Aristotelian *lexis*, i.e. statements that would be situated along the axes of the universe of communication and transmit an objective content, but the sounding of the *phone*, the inarticulate and passionate dimension of a voice that directly indicates affects – or more precisely, *is* the affect as indicative of itself, “tautegorical”,<sup>22</sup> Lyotard says – rather than inscribing them as a moment of representation. The *phone* escapes the temporal order of the signifying chain and its interlocutors, in which a first “I” relates to a second “you”, eventually convertible to objective third-person propositions that may be reported in a case study, ultimately becoming a theme for public, scientific discourse, with its “transcendental pragmatics” and rule-bound exchanges. The *phone* is simply *there*, as a tone or *timbre* just as elusive as it is insistent, in a *now* that defies the order of time as the structure of before and after; and it cannot even be attributed to a subject that would be its bearer, but rather belongs to the same dimension as the *in-fans*, the speechless and affective life that haunts all language, also and perhaps most insistently in its silence, in not being heard, or in disrupting the order of the *lexis*.

What is ultimately at stake in these later meditations on Freud’s writings is perhaps not the truth about the Freudian texts themselves, even though Lyotard remains a scrupulous reader, sometimes even to the point of obscuring his more general claims. In *Discours, figure*, regardless of the suspicion against conceptual synthesis and argumentative closure, psychoanalysis could still be marshalled against the phenomenology of the body and visual depth as a discourse that would somehow be more *true*, closer to the event and the donation, and could be opposed to the philosophical project as such, which Lyotard at the time perceived as inextricably bound up with a Platonist downgrading of the disruptive force at work inside or beneath the sensible. However, just as inevitably as, say, the Nietzschean overturning of metaphysics as analysed by Heidegger, this countermove tended to produce yet another metaphysics, this time centred around the “drives”, as Lyotard would later say. Against this, the later texts no longer pose as anti- or counter-philosophical, but propose as the task of philosophy to listen to that which lies underneath the *lexis*, communication, and the subject, not in order to dispel them in favour of some more originary power or energy (the “libidinal”, as it was called in the earlier texts), but rather to uncover a

22 *Lectures d'enfance*, p. 137. The term “tautegorical” is also used by Lyotard to describe the Kantian sublime, in its capacity to disclose to us how it feels to think; see Lyotard, *Leçons sur l'analytique du sublime (Kant, Critique de la faculté de juger, §§ 23–29)* (Paris: Galilée, 1991), p. 26.

different stratum – the passible, infancy – that they always presuppose. In this, psychoanalysis, art, and a certain albeit reluctantly accepted phenomenology, are allies, not because any one of them would be more true, but because each of them, in their particular way, are attempts to grasp the same ungraspable and ineluctable condition.

## The Limits of Communication

In the present context, it is particularly relevant to see how the theme of an irreducible obverse side to the *lexis* already from the outset comes to rework the idea of communication from within, so that it appears precisely as that which art must resist in order to preserve its proper, eventful dimension, that within the aesthetic that makes aesthetics as a discipline possible but also eludes it.

In an essay that was composed roughly out at the same time as *Les Immatériaux* opened, “Something Like: ‘Communication... without Communication’”,<sup>23</sup> Lyotard radically questions the idea of communication that at first glance seems like the unquestioned point of departure for the exhibition. The starting point for the essay is the respective and seemingly incompatible claims by Kant and Adorno, firstly that the faculty of judging is what renders our feeling universally communicable (*mitteilbar*) without the mediation of a concept (Kant), secondly that no work of art should be understood through the category of communication (Adorno). However, rather than an opposition, Lyotard here sees both claims as differently phrased, although in the end not incompatible, reactions to Hegel’s sublation of art into the concept, and in both he perceives the continuity of a quest for the possibility of a non-conceptual communication. It is precisely this communication without communication that is extinguished in modern communication theories and technologies, and finally in an art-industry that, in a phrase that echoes Horkheimer and Adorno’s analysis of the culture industry, “would be a completion of speculative metaphysics, a way in which Hegel is present, has succeeded, in Hollywood”.<sup>24</sup>

Against this Lyotard marshals the Kantian analysis of the judgement of taste as something that is always presumed, a feeling or sentimentality that also requires a particular kind of community anterior to communication and pragmatics (the choice of terms here translating Lyotard’s resistance to the theories of communicative action and transcendental pragmatics in Habermas and Apel). This he calls a “passibility to space and time, necessary

23 The text was first presented as a lecture at the conference “Art et communication,” organized by Robert Allezaud at the Sorbonne in October 1985.

24 Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, p. 115.

forms of *aesthesis*”,<sup>25</sup> whose very possibility implicitly would then be what is fundamentally at stake in the world of immaterials, where “*calculated* situations are put forward as an aesthetic”,<sup>26</sup> and where the demand for efficiency, performance, and malleability have by far superseded the cybernetic theories that formed the horizon of Heidegger’s meditations on the essence of technology in the 1950s.

This passibility is neither an activity of forming a giving matter nor the simple passivity of receiving it, but rather, once more in continuity with the central theme of *Discours, figure*, presupposes a “donation” as “something fundamental, originary”,<sup>27</sup> that eludes our control and mastery. In the Kantian vocabulary employed by Lyotard here, this would not be the *determinable* matter given in an intuition that in fact is there only as already *determined* by the categories of the understanding, and a such only separable through a secondary reflection, but something that *seizes* us without already being part of cognition, and without necessarily being destined to become such a part. The origin of this gift however remains concealed, it is an X that Lyotard here refers not only to the Kantian transcendental object = x (in fact somewhat misleadingly, since this “x” is not a part of the conceptual structure of the third Critique that he here draws on, but belongs specifically to the analysis of cognition in the first Critique, as its constitutive limit), but also, and perhaps more pertinently, to Heidegger’s being as the withdrawn side of the ontological difference. The x is what gives matter for reflection and determination, and it is *on* it, perhaps even on its erasure or ruins, that we construct or aesthetic philosophies. The feeling that accompanies it is a “welcoming of what is given”,<sup>28</sup> and it is what ultimately renders the subject open to the world in a way that will also hold this world in suspense. The violence of donation and of a truth that “detonates” – which were the guiding ideas of *Discours, figure* as the argument moved from the still harmonious views of the phenomenologies of perception and the flesh to the unthinkable and unrepresentable primary process in Freud – here give way to a more benign, or perhaps neutral, conception of welcoming, giving, and gift that comes from Heidegger, although this is a heritage towards which Lyotard will remain ambivalent to the end, and not only for political reasons, but first and foremost because the response to the withdrawal of presence for him is an open-ended *experimentation* that he, rightly or wrongly, perceives to be missing in Heidegger.

This passible moment, the *there now* that is given only in a temporal spasm that precludes any there or now from being simply there and now, but only

25 Ibid., p. 110.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., p. 111.

28 Ibid.

allows them to be understood in an act of anamnesis or “re-writing”, is necessarily forgotten in representation and all the modes of production of reality that draw on modern communication technologies, it is their always presupposed and yet elusive underside. And yet it is precisely not opposed to them, but what makes them possible, which is why the immaterials of communication and resistance belong together, and one without the other would only give us a limited and distorted picture.

If we disregard this originary entanglement, the idea of resistance might seem to once more ensnare us in a dualist conception, where donation, the gift, and the domain of originary passibility only appear as that which *distorts* communication, as a kind of negativity and noise that in the end contributes nothing positive to thinking and experience. But as Lyotard notes, this is “because we think of presence according to the exclusive modality of masterful intervention”,<sup>29</sup> and creation only as a mode of technical construction at the expense of the openness to the eventfulness of the event; it must be both, anamnesis and construction, a memory of withdrawn presence and the experimental gay science unfolding in its wake.

In other words, if this withdrawal in some respects entails a loss of experience, a hollowing out of the subject, it has however itself to be *thought and felt*, also as an opening towards *other* dimensions of sensibility and experience. The exhibition becomes a way of doing this, i.e., not just to “signify” the difference between what in *Discours, figure* still appeared as the “space of the subject and the system”, but also to render this difference itself and its effects on us palpable. Thus the necessity of confronting “works” in the widest sense of the term – including not only the fine arts, but also science, technological artefacts, theories, modes of writing – with each other in order to produce the “unease” that a philosophical proposal, in the coherence and closure that inevitably characterize it, cannot avoid *dispelling*, and thus the need of an exhibitionary mode that expose thinking to an *outside*.

## An Aesthetic of Presence

A term that more and more comes to the fore throughout Lyotard’s later writings on art is “presence”. In what way should we understand this term? At first, it may seem to signal a somewhat surprisingly direct return to a phenomenology of perception and of the body, based in an aesthetic vision that underscores the material presence of artworks, touch, gesture, and a whole vocabulary that reinstalls precisely those motifs that *Les Immatériaux* would have deemed no longer possible. For some, this shift amounts to a nostalgic turn that, possibly under the influence of Heidegger, or more generally a phenomenological suspicion towards technology, discarded the

29 Ibid., p. 118.

radical perspective of invention and creation that was at the basis of *Les Immatériaux*.<sup>30</sup> As we will see, even though this characterization might be misleading as an account of Lyotard's development, it points to a set of problems in the late work that must be addressed. While the shift was not only already part of the initial statement of *Les Immatériaux*, but also corresponds to a motif that was there in Lyotard's thought from the beginning of his trajectory, it is also true that many of the claims that we find in his later writings perhaps tend to short-circuit the possibilities of his inquiry, in tying it too closely to particular forms of art in a way that immobilizes the exchange of concepts and particulars. In short, as we will argue, to remain faithful to the path opened up here, we must question some of Lyotard's examples, at least to the extent that they take on too much of a paradigmatic value, and in fact, in spite of the open-ended and hesitant philosophical character of his late writings, seem to resuscitate many traditional *topoi* of art theory.

From a certain distance, no doubt a respectful one and yet a distance, the term presence obviously refers to Derrida and the problem of the metaphysics of presence inherited from Heidegger (and the term "deconstruction" sometimes appears in the later writings, without further explication, in a way similar to *Discours, figure*). Lyotard's *presence* is however rather the opposite of Derrida's, or rather, it bears a strong resemblance to the kind of thinking that Derrida was trying to articulate through concepts like trace, *différance*, and spacing, precisely as the limits to the metaphysics of presence. Lyotard's presence signals the moment of what must remain elusive in the sensible, although by way of a difference that is announced in and by the sensible; it is a sensible no longer understood in opposition to the intelligible, but as a dimension of its own, which is why it also draws close to the immaterial materiality already at stake in *Les Immatériaux*. Colors, words, gestures, sounds are on the one hand what is presented, on the other hand they withdraw from presentation, and this duplicity is what gives the aesthetic dimension its privileged role; not however as a fullness or richness of sense that would have been betrayed in objectivity and technoscientific constructions, as the traditional phenomenological answer from Husserl's *Krisis* onward has been, but as a more enigmatic kind of poverty of sense, a "thing" that does not even address us, or remains turned away in its very address.

It is true that Lyotard often displays a profound suspicion toward the term aesthetics, which he associates to a tradition that finds its resources in Kant's third Critique and the Analytic of beauty, and its claims about beauty and harmony. Against this, he pits the Analytic of the sublime with its disruption of beauty's consonance, which for him signals an "anaesthetic" power that shatters form and the transitive relation of concept and world.

30 As has been suggested by Jean-Louis Déotte, in "*Les Immatériaux* de Lyotard (1985): un programme figural", *Appareil* 10 (2012).

Lyotard has given us many versions of this particular claim, sometimes in a way that seems to straightforwardly disavow the basic ideas explored in *Les Immatériaux*. In the brief essay “Two Forms of Abstraction” (1988) he suggests that art today – somewhat surprisingly claimed to be generally characterized by “abstraction” – follows two main avenues. The first he calls Hegelian, or an art of the “understanding”, of the *Verstand*, where forms are posited as exterior to content, allowing beauty to become kitsch, without any density of singular experience. Such is the art, he suggests, produced through computation, synthesis, and technology – claims that are difficult not to read as directed against many of the items that were selected for *Les Immatériaux*, where the claim often seemed to be a discovery of a continuum between art from the early avant-garde onward and the new forms of everyday technologies that render the limits of the body and perception fluid and insecure. The second tendency, only briefly alluded to in the text, instead follows the line traced out by the Kantian sublime, with its emphasis on the unrepresentable, and leads up to a final alternative that once more seems to render aesthetics impossible, or at least without any purchase on what is essential: “caught between the two kinds of abstraction that I have just outlined, that of understanding which determines visual data, and that which clings to the indeterminable material presence hidden in the presentation of data, thus torn apart, how can an aesthetics, a reflection on the pleasure provided by the beauty of free forms, perpetuate itself?”<sup>31</sup> Now, while the first line seems to usher in a pessimistic view of art, the second opens the question of the work as event, as Lyotard underlines in another essay, “The Pictorial Event Today” (1993): “The intrinsic vacuity of the pictorial institution does not at all change the necessity of the gesture of painting, its ‘call’ to be carried out.”<sup>32</sup> This *gesture* of painting does not lead to a display of already recognized cultural forms, but opens onto a thought that mobilizes a different type of body: “Painting is the thought of painting, but its thought-body. It operates in, with and against the space-time and matter-color: the sensorium of the seeing body.”<sup>33</sup> Rather than celebrating the visual as a plenitude that would be the result of creation and subjective expression, the work is an appearance in which an apparition happens, by way of a particular negation of the visual: “The pictorial *factum* is completely different: it turns the chromatic (or formal, etc.) appearance into an apparition by marking the *aistheton* (the sensible) with a hallmark of its threatening suppression. The visibility of painting always retrieves itself up on blindness.”<sup>34</sup> It is not directed to sight, but to what is “incarcerated in sight”, and “transforms appearance into apparition, like the

31 Jean-François Lyotard, *Textes dispersés I: Esthétique et théorie de l'art / Miscellaneous Texts I: Aesthetics and Theory of Art* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), p. 199.

32 Ibid., p. 227.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., p. 228.



poem changes words, vehicles in the communicational field, into uncertain asteroids enveloped in nothingness.”<sup>35</sup>

This process is for Lyotard precisely what gets lost in aesthetics. But would it not be equally pertinent, in fact more so, to see *both* moments as integral part of aesthetics, first of all since this is explicitly the case in Kant? The resource of such an aesthetic critique of reason, which is part of a long tradition extending far beyond the particular claims of Lyotard, is not that it fetishizes a sensibility that would in general be refractory to conceptual subsumption – although it sometimes does this too – but that it demands that such resistance be articulated in works that must always be approached as singular events, whose particular presence and take on the concept-sense divide cannot be derived from a general theory. This is in fact sometimes highlighted and even pushed to an extreme by Lyotard, to the effect that the only adequate philosophical response would be to surrender to the singular – once more a temptation to anti-philosophy, as it were, which in the end may prove as much a dead end as the unquestioned confidence in the subsuming gesture of philosophical aesthetics. This question of singularity, understood as a challenge to theory rather than its mere demise, is in fact what opens the problem of *writing*, as it once also did for Adorno: aesthetic theory, to the extent that it wants to measure itself to what is at stake in the works, is not theory that would have “the aesthetic” as one of its objects, but it is writing that itself must become constellation, in search of its own rules, without thereby merely emulating literature or some other artistic form. Just as little as the artwork can be accounted for by what it says, let alone “communicates”, can philosophical reflection, to the extent that it, as Adorno demands, steps into the monad of the work, settle for generalities, even though it is, as such, inevitably bound up with conceptual work, which is why aesthetic theory is still *theory*, even if not simply a theory *of* something that it would encounter as a set of mere external particulars. Aesthetic theory does not have objects that are simply there, but must in a certain way constitute the objects as questions at the same moment as it constitutes itself as a theory, in an exchange that renders both poles of the equation just as problematic.

It is however just as significant as it is problematic that Lyotard chooses to focus his later reflections almost exclusively on painting, not just in the biographical sense that his writings for various reasons dealt with painters like Jacques Monory, Valerio Adami, Sam Francis, Karel Appel, and many others, but also because of the philosophical weight given to a particular medium, to the extent that it is precisely painting that is given the role of challenging the philosopher to surrender in the face of what cannot be articulated. While Lyotard constantly rejects a certain art-historical approach, and instead wants to understand the works from within, precisely as questions to thought, he

35 Ibid.

remains strangely dependent on a set of claims inherited from the history of modernist painting, which as it were takes its revenge all the more since this historical narrative is claimed to have been suspended.

Thus, in these writings, Lyotard both pushes his own anaesthetic to the limit – of which surrender is one, although perhaps not the most productive form – and rehearses a series of surprisingly conventional claims that often seem to take him back to the rhetoric of action painting. In the book on Appel, Lyotard thus speaks of the necessity “to terminate the authority of arguments and to disturb the calm assurance of philosophical aesthetics”,<sup>36</sup> and what occasions this surrender is colour, or rather the “gesture of colour” that provides the book with its title, *Un geste de couleur*. Appel, according to Lyotard, approaches colour as that “which is there before form and concepts”,<sup>37</sup> and like Pollock, Appel would inscribe colour through a gesture that transfers the body onto the canvas, in a movement “not mediated by a concept, images, schemas, memories”, but as “colour itself”.<sup>38</sup> Colour is what transforms matter, leading it to “vibrate,” and finally is itself that which performs the “dance”. In the book on Sam Francis, *Leçons de ténèbres*, he finds a similar surrender to the chromatic material, this time inflected through darkness, whose “lesson” is that we must look to “the substance of which light is made”, leading Francis’ painting to “emanate from a blind void, (...) vanishing towards Black”.<sup>39</sup>

In this way, painting more and more becomes the very name of thought. Rather than a particular art form with its history and institutions, it appears as a cipher for the ineffable, as if divested of that historical specificity which it still retains, precisely in the evocation of colour, gesture, vibrations, dance, and a whole series of related terms that aspire to displace the vocabulary of subjectivity and expression in favour of the work’s eventhood, while still perpetuating it. It is precisely at this point that we believe that fidelity to Lyotard’s problems necessitates that we distance ourselves from what, no doubt too quickly, could be called his particular “taste”.

## Conclusion: Spacing Philosophy

From the point of view of those artistic practices that make up our present, there seems to be a need to disengage from painting, or at least to think the problem that Lyotard addresses in the name of painting in its full generality.

36 Jean-François Lyotard, “Karel Appel: Un geste de couleur / Karel Appel: A Gesture of Colour”, in *Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists*, vol. 1 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), p. 27.

37 Ibid., p. 159.

38 Ibid., p. 179.

39 Jean-François Lyotard, “Sam Francis: Leçon de Ténèbres / Sam Francis: Lessons of Darkness”, in *Writings on Contemporary Art and Artists*, vol. 2 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), p. 11.

The questions of the sensible, touch, and presence indeed remain with us, perhaps even in an intensified form, given the ubiquity of the digital and the electronic: the constellation of concepts and intuitions, of the body and the senses, and of the relation between work and truth, has by no means receded from the horizon. That the promises or threats of violent transformations of the life-world, of our bodily sensorium, of our experience of space and time, continue to haunt us shows the importance of the task.

In many ways the proposals of *Les Immatériaux* retrieve the promise of *indeterminacy* of the early avant-garde of the twentieth century, as Lyotard's own statements clearly indicate. While we seem to be faced with an infinity – and the experience of infinity as an abyss is a fundamental feature of *Les Immatériaux* as well as of Lyotard's writings on the sublime – of possible modes of experience, this just as much produces anxieties and fantasies, precisely the kind of “unease” that the exhibition wanted to provoke: a loss of self, identity, and stability, a disconnection from the space-time of perception, from matter, materials, and materiality, from the *ground* in all senses of the world. The question is how to make such an unease productive, how to make it into the *matter* of thought, in all senses of the term; how to allow for the “foundation crisis” not to be resolved too quickly by appeals to either the synthetic constructions of technoscience or a naïve, sensory given, but to make the “unease” that it produces become a productive condition for an experimental thinking and making.

The philosophical task proposed by Lyotard, if we see *Les Immatériaux* and the conjectural *Résistances* together with the many essays and writings that surround the first project and may be understood as pointing to the second, is the question of how we can approach artworks that, while they at least from conceptual art onward actively resist traditional modes of aesthetic enjoyment, nevertheless not just amount to a withdrawal of sense or sensibility, but rather open up to a restructuring of the sensorium that allows representation and its underside to enter into a new constellation that would be in tune with the mutations of our present space-time. For this, the term “postmodern” that Lyotard at one point suggested was perhaps a deceptive one, since it tends to enclose us in the schemas of cause-effect and before-after that his thought on the temporal knots of presence precisely took as its task to undo. Something similar must of course be said of all claims to locate the mutations of our present. For who would claim to know what the present is, what its limits and possibilities are? Just like any other temporal category the present is only given in anamnesis, through a rewriting and working-through; *Les Immatériaux* was such an attempt, unfinished, incomplete, and even contradictory, which is why it still demands to be not only thought, but also continued.

In hindsight, one cannot avoid noting that most of the technological inventions that appeared new and exciting in the 1980s have either become part of everyday life, and in this sense lost their capacity for producing both unease and thought, or, more alarmingly, turned into an increasingly hegemonic system of information and surveillance. All of this could be taken as simply an intensified version of what Adorno called the “administered world” – and one in which the techniques of administration have grown infinitely more subtle, insidious, and difficult to resist. In the world of global capital, where the ubiquity of information ensures that all thought is transformed into bits of exchangeable digitized units, identity and difference go together, and the unifying and levelling power of what was once called the “culture industry” have been replaced by a smooth production of differences, in taste, desires, lifestyles, and affective dispositions. Variation, specification, and infinitesimal penetration into the local is how capital works, and how it sustains its ordering and regimenting function on a higher level.

It is against this development that one could pit the insistence on zones of resistance to information: opacity, inertia, friction, physicality, all seem to offer other possible avenues, and the thinking of the sensible that Lyotard engages in his last writings. The sequel to *Les Immatériaux* could in this sense have amounted to a counter-statement, or, as we have attempted to show, an obverse side that was already present in the first exhibition, perhaps even as the possibility of completing its trajectory in the opposite direction, from language to body, from the immateriality of information to a kind of resistant materiality that is inherent in information as such.

The first problem with such a countermove is that it inevitably – as we saw in many instances in Lyotard’s own writings – runs the risk of reactivating regressive ideas of art, drawing on what are in fact highly traditional ideas of painting in particular, which since the advent of modernism in the mid-nineteenth century for a host of historical reasons has been accredited with the potential for providing us with an alternative to technological mediation. While obviously not as such simply exhausted, the ideas of touch, gesture, and the presence of colour, together with many other similar moves that emphasize the irreplaceable Here and Now in body art, performance, etc., often function as integrated parts of the system they supposedly dislodge, and in this they are akin to the movement of differentiation that is the other side of systemic control, and may exert a compensatory function. Such returns to the sensible can sometimes be conservative in an uninteresting sense, in simply claiming that we need to regress to some earlier point in time; others have a more complex agenda, for instance as in the theories of “obsolescence”, where the strategic return to technologies and mediums that are no longer considered up to date allow for a different take on historical genealogies, but without making any claim that we could return to the

past without further ado.<sup>40</sup> Both of these returns however share a focus on medium, no doubt as an echo of a formalist legacy that can be retrieved in any number of ways, and yet remains caught in a theory of art and an aesthetic that begins by shunning away from the present. The convergence of material “carriers”, or at least their almost infinite variability – which was one of the basic claims of *Les Immatériaux* – poses problems that are unlikely to be addressed in a relevant fashion by the reclaiming of obsolete technologies. This is obviously not to deny the force, critical value or interest of any particular form of artistic practice, only to note the complexity of the problem of resistance, which, as already the classical formulations of information theory show, is a necessary part of transmission and not something that would form a radical outside. It would seem that Lyotard poses the problem, but then, as he moves away from the at least seemingly celebratory stance of *Les Immatériaux*, somehow ends up being trapped in his own examples, which limit the force and scope of his philosophical claims.

Second, if we begin in a theory of resistance – which must also be thought as a resistance *in* or *to* theory itself, if we follow Lyotard’s mediations on passibility, the event, and other related concepts – that takes its cues from the physical features of circuits and information systems, how can we move upwards to the dimension of subjectivity and social practice? If a concept like resistance is to be at the centre, the political dimension that seemed more or less absent from *Les Immatériaux* must somehow be addressed, in a way that articulates the physical with the social.

In terms of exhibitions as physical sites, an ulterior issue would be the possibility of pursuing the inverted trajectory in the form of an exhibition that takes account of the transformations of space itself that have occurred since *Les Immatériaux*. Could the move back from language to body, or on the level of an exhibition, from information to space, at all be undertaken in the sense that it would project an abstract level into a circumscribed location? If this is still the case, it must in a produce its own space as a different kind of interstice or interface in a way that takes into account the shifting relations between the abstract and the concrete, the material and the immaterial. The sites of the work and the exhibition have long since become if not wholly obsolete, then at least far removed from the phenomenological coordinates that once upheld the first discussions on site specificity, and have gone through many stages, from the various attempts to inhabit the institutions in a reflexive and critical fashion, to the complex overlays of places, times, and representation that characterize much of contemporary art.<sup>41</sup> Thus, spiralling downwards we pass

40 This concept has been developed by Rosalind Krauss; see, for instance, “Reinventing the Medium”, *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 25 (1999), and “‘The Rock’: William Kentridge’s Drawings for Projection”, *October*, no. 92 (2000).

41 For a succinct analysis of these three steps, the phenomenological site, the site of institutional critique, and the “discursive” site, see Miwon Kwon, “One Place after

from what appears as spheres of pure ideality, a weightless realm of information circulating frictionlessly, to inertia, body, visceral grounding, and incarnation – but to *which body, which ground*, provided that we must keep the crisis of foundations alive as the possibility of thought? As Lyotard himself suggested, the grand claims about the end of Modernity and the possible emergence of something entirely new, were in the end discernible only as a question mark or as something missing, a certain absence: “I keep telling myself, in fact, that the entirety of the exhibition could be thought of as a sign that refers to a missing signified.”<sup>42</sup>

Another: Notes on Site Specificity”, *October*, Vol. 80 (Spring, 1997): 85–110.

42 Interview with Bernard Blistène, in *Art And Philosophy* (Milan: Flash Art Books, 1991).



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- [Figure 1] Communication diagram (Source: *Petit Journal*, 28 March–15 July 1985, Paris, p.2. Centre Pompidou, MNAM, Bibliothèque Kandinsky).
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Yuk Hui

Andreas Broeckmann (eds.)

30 Years after *Les Immatériaux*: Art, Science, and Theory

**In 1985, the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard curated a groundbreaking exhibition called *Les Immatériaux* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. The exhibition showed how telecommunication technologies were beginning to impact every aspect of life. At the same time, it was a material demonstration of what Lyotard called the post-modern condition.**

**This book features a previously unpublished report by Jean-François Lyotard on the conception of *Les Immatériaux* and its relation to postmodernity. Reviewing the historical significance of the exhibition, his text is accompanied by twelve contemporary meditations. The philosophers, art historians, and artists analyse this important moment in the history of media and theory, and reflect on the new material conditions brought about by digital technologies in the last 30 years.**

Texts by Daniel Birnbaum, Jean-Louis Boissier, Andreas Broeckmann, Thierry Dufrêne, Francesca Gallo, Charlie Gere, Antony Hudek, Yuk Hui, Jean-François Lyotard, Robin Mackay, Anne Elisabeth Sejten, Bernard Stiegler, and Sven-Olov Wallenstein.



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